

East Ross Deer Group Management Plan 2016 -2020

The plan was produced for the East Ross Deer Management group by Land Consultancy
Services Ltd with financial Assistance from Scottish Natural Heritage

Introduction and executive summary

This deer management plan, which is the first collaborative Plan that this Deer Management Group have adopted has been produced for the East Ross Deer Management Group (ERDMG) by Land Consultancy Services Ltd (LCS) with funding assistance being received from Scottish Rural Development Program via SNH and comes into force from 1st April 2016.

It will be utilized as the baseline plan for the effective management of wild deer across the Group area. The plan will undergo regular reviews (at 6 monthly intervals) and will be updated to reflect changes within the Group, the Group member's, the habitat within the Group and to reflect any statutory changes in legislation as it affects the Group's interests both in the management of deer and otherwise, over the plans lifespan which is currently predicted to be 5 years.

As this is the first collective Management Plan produced on behalf of the Group an in-depth review of the plan will be carried out by the group members at the half way point of the plans lifespan. If it is considered at this point that change to the strategic structures is required they will be made.

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Deer Management Plan Purpose

Wild Deer in Scotland have a unique place within the history & culture of our upland areas. Red deer are recognized nationally as an iconic species and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the public body charged with the custodianship of the countries natural environment have recognized its importance by including red deer within "Scotlands Big 5" most iconic wildlife creatures.

Wild deer and their habits are ever evolving and the plan is designed to be a living document to assist with the management of the wild deer found within the Group boundaries and allow for changing conditions and circumstances over its life span which covers the period 2016 -2020. The Plan will be reviewed by the group on a 6 monthly basis and changes will be made wherever the need arises.

The geographic area covered by this Deer Management Plan extends to an area of approximately 20000 hectares which is made up of several land types and use but is principally one of open heather moorland, woodland enclosures and some improved farmland to the South and North.

The nucleus of the group is currently formulated by 6 of the largest private land owners within the group area. The 6 members have been working in loose collaboration for over 15 years in regard to the management of the wild deer herd found within their range. It is hoped that this plan will launch greater interest in the wild deer resource within the group area and where deer have impacts, other land owners and users may become engaged in deer issues and participate within the group.

The plan outlines the principle aims and activities of each of the group members such as agriculture, conservation, forestry and energy production and how that will interlink with the management of the wild deer herd in a sustainable manner and to the benefit of not only the individuals involved but also to the wider local community.

The principle species to be considered by this plan are Red Deer in the open hill range however the presence of both Sika and Roe can also be found within the group area and the management of all 3 species has an important role to play in the delivery of sustainable land management practices.

The use of statistical evidence collaborated by SNH, such as annual count data, culling information, natural deer recruitment and mortality records for wild deer populations has become the primary tool for managing the resident deer population within upland Scotland and forms the foundation of this management plan. This management model enables natural changes in the demographic for a variety of reasons relation to natural occurrences whilst remaining able to deliver the fundamental principles of natural capital values and management.

Whilst the group recognises the needs and benefits of an active and working wild deer management plan they are also acutely aware that the successful management of the wild deer found within the group area does not come without financial investment by members. Principally this comes in the form of committed, motivated and highly skilled staff who will ultimately adopt much of the responsibility for the practical delivery of the deer management plan.

It is therefore incumbent on the DMG that this is also achieved whilst adopting the industry Best Practice Guidance – Guidance which has been developed by SNH over a number of years and is now adopted and recognized as the minimum benchmark for individuals actively operating in the management of wild deer within Scotland.

It is intended that this plan will provide the following:

Provide a strategic overview of the management of wild deer within the group boundaries and provide a platform for more detailed discussion and planning within the ERDMG on an annual basis for the effective delivery of both the management of the wild deer herd for the benefit of the members, the natural environment and the wider public interest and safety.

Ensure that there is a collaborative and sustainable approach to the management of wild deer within the group geographic boundaries.

To ensure that full engagement and interaction takes place wherever necessary between the DMG and communities, businesses, organisations and individuals who reside in and are active within the group geographical area.

A set of realistic actions which enable delivery of the DMG objectives.

A strategy that reflects the aspirations that group members hold in respect of the management of wild deer within the wider natural environment and habitats of the DMG area.

Assist in maintaining and strengthening the economic benefits of wild deer to the local communities that interlink with the DMG.

A working document that is available for inspection and comment by interested members of the wider public within the DMG area.

Enables the DMG to enable delivery of the maximum level of public benefit from a member of what is now accepted as one of Scotland's top 5 wildlife creatures.

About the group

The Group Area

The East Ross Deer Management group encapsulates a land area of circa 20,000 hectares of mixed land types with the predominance being heather moorland, commercial forestry blocks, parcels of farmland both for arable and stock farming use and in the Northern section of the group there are areas of the land which are under crofting tenure including 3 areas of common grazing.

The deer group range is predominantly fenced on its boundaries with stock proof deer fencing and in reality there is little by the way of in or out migration within the wild deer herd. The Eastern boundary follows the B9176 Ardross to Ardgay road. This boundary which extends for approximately 16 miles is formed by a deer fence for almost its entirety with the remaining unfenced area due to be completed in spring 2016.

Much of this fencing excludes the wild deer from free movement into woodland under public and private ownership and also protects agricultural land to the south and North of the group.

The south of the group is bounded by the settlement of Ardross (*Population 150*) which is 2 miles north of the town of Alness (*Population 5800*) on the edge of the industrialised Cromarty Firth. Ardross community has some agricultural activities and interests and this area is where the arable farming activity within the group boundaries takes place. The arable land is predominantly protected from the open deer range by deer fencing, some of which directly protects the farmland and some which protects via the forestry blocks that bound the farmland. The community has its own school and modern community centre which acts as the hub of the community activities. Ardross Community Council were consulted as part of the preparation of the deer management plan.

On the eastern fringe of the deer group is the community of Edderton (population 338), which is primarily a crofting and farming community. They are served by their own primary school with senior schooling provided in Tain (4 miles) to the east. The community has a buffer of open farm & moorland which places it out with the actual boundaries of the group (2 miles). Significantly, the physical impacts felt on communities within deer management group areas is mitigated in this instance as the modern boundary deer fence which is in place provides that there is little if any physical impact felt by deer which are managed under the auspices of this plan. Any deer population impacts on this community are minimal and arise from a local population of roe deer and small numbers of red deer which are hefted within the public owned forestry blocks to the north & south of the community.

On the North of the group area is the settlement area of Ardgay (Population 496) which is bounded by interests relating to crofting, farming & forestry. The River Carron a salmon fishing river of some reputation flows directly into the Kyle of Sutherland to the North of the village.

The Kyle of Sutherland is the confluence that links the Dornoch firth with the significant salmon hosting rivers of central Sutherland. These comprise of the Carron, the Shin, the Cassley and the upper and lower Oykel. These rivers have vast ecological, environmental and economic significance to the wider region. The River Oykel being designated as a Specially Protected Area (SPA).

The northern reaches of the group form part of the water catchment area for the river Carron and given that some of the current group members the group have significant interests both ecologically and economically within this river system the considerations of positive deer management as outlined throughout this plan ensures that any potential threats to this ecosystem will be fully considered and reduced or removed

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Current Individual Group Members

Strathruisdale & Crannich Estate

Interests	Hectares	% of Group Area
<i>Sheep Farming, Sporting Estate, Renewables & minerals</i>	<u>4352</u>	<u>22%</u>

The strategic objectives for Strathruisdale & Crannich estate are the management and improvement of the land holding in a sustainable manner whilst continuing to contribute to the local economic system through their activities. To provide and improve the diversity of uses within the land holding whilst continuing to exercise high levels of environmental stewardship. To continue to operate a viable agricultural enterprise. This is predominantly focused on sheep production. The holding currently carries 1100 breeding sheep which spend a part of their year on the open hill range and the remainder on in by land parcels.

Deer stalking makes a valuable economic contribution to the land holding via the income generated through sporting letting of both stags and hinds throughout their seasons.

There is a potential within the estates plans to create deer ranching unit although this has not been firmly committed to at this point.

No supplementary feeding of the wild deer herd is undertaken on the holding.

The estate has an interest in the Beinn Tharsuinn Wind Farm operated by Scottish Power where it is a shared host to an operating wind farm with access to the operation being taken through the neighboring group member Midfean Estate. This has improved access to the wild deer range and the estate deer management has benefited from this access.

The estate employs four people part time and two of these persons hold DMQ level1 & 2 (Fit and Comp register & Trained Hunter Status) along with First Aid, Manual Handling, Deer Prep and Larder work and ATV certification

Mid Fearn

Interests	Hectares	% of Group Area

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<u>Sheep & Cattle Farming, Renewables, Residential letting and fish farming.</u>	<u>5260</u>	<u>26%</u>
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The underlying strategic objectives for the management of Midfearn are based around the agricultural activities (1200 breeding sheep and sucker beef herd), renewable energy generation through a share in the Beinn Tharsuinn Wind Farm, 2 hydro electricity generation schemes, salmon fry production and sporting activities based on deer stalking.

The environmental, ecological and habitat management is of vital importance to the estate given the diversity of interests which takes place on the holding.

Activities relating to deer stalking and the sale of venison provide important economic benefit to the estate and play a part in providing full time employments roles on the estate. The letting of stalking provides opportunities for uptake of the estates holiday let properties and provides a small income stream to the estate.

Supplementary feeding of the wild deer herd only takes place during periods of extreme weather and at that point fodder feedstuffs are provided ad lib.

The estate has recently participated in the planting of native woodland schemes, which have been fully fenced to provide protection from deer. The long term objectives for these woodlands include the provision of shelter for the wild deer herd.

Three persons are employed part time and two persons hold DMQ level 1 & 2 (Fit & Comp register & trained Hunter Status). All three have undergone Lantra ATW training and hold first aid certificates.

Gledfield

Interests	Hectares	% of Group Area
<u>Sporting Estate with Woodland and Salmon Fishing</u>	<u>2825</u>	<u>14%</u>

The land management objectives for Gledfield Estate are focused around conservation and environmental management accompanied with a low intensity farming model. Within these environmental a conservation interest's wild deer play a significant part of and form the basis of the estates planning principles.

The wild deer do not factor highly in economic terms although the income derived through venison sales and occasional let stalking provides the estate with useful income and helps to sustain full time employees.

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Gledfield undertakes supplementary feeding in times of hard weather and this ordinary consist of feed potatoes and deer mineral blocks.

Gledfield are a beat owner on the Carron River and recognise that the ecological management of the estate with regard to the wild deer herd is intrinsically linked and important in regard to the lands roll as part of the river catchment area.

The estate has one full time person responsible for deer management who is DMQ level1 & 2 qualified

Dounie

Interests	Hectares	% of Group Area
<u>Sporting & Crofting Estate, Salmon Fishing, Forestry and holiday letting</u>	<u>600</u>	<u>3%</u>

Dounie Estate strategic management is one of environmental custodians of the land holding with the land use being shared in part with the interests of the crofting community (the grazing of sheep – it is thought that the crofting sheep population is around 200 breeding sheep) on the estate. The open hill wild deer range also consists of crofting common grazing although the common grazing is currently not utilised by any of the crofters.

Stalking makes a modest but important contribution to the estates economic activity and viability through the letting of some stalking commercially. This also provides for uptake of holiday accommodation on the estate.

The estate has forestry interests with an area of commercial forestry which is fully deer fenced from the open hill range. There is a small sub population of deer within the woodland and this is actively monitored by the estate particularly in regard to protection of the woodland assists.

The estate does not undertake supplementary feeding of the wild deer herd but are proactive in the management of the habitat through muirburning.

Dounie Estate has a riparian interest and owns a beat on the river Carron. This provides economic benefit to the estate and careful management of the ecology of the estate is of vital importance in regard to this asset.

The estate employs one full time and one part time person to manage the deer along with other estate duties. One had DMQ level 1 qualification

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Gruinards

Interests	Hectares	% of Group Area
<i>Sporting & Crofting Estate, Fishing and holiday letting</i>	<u>1782</u>	<u>9%</u>

Gruinards Estate has strategic management objectives formulated on the sustainability of the environmental and amenity values linked to the estate.

They have a shared land use with the crofting tenants on the estate. The common grazing is managed in a collaborative way between the estate and the crofting tenants to ensure a balanced approach to its use to the mutual benefit of all involved.

The estate supports crofters who have been active in progressing habitat and environmental improvements through recent Agri-environment and climate change schemes which had been run through Scottish Rural Development programs (SRDP). These have seen significant improvements to the habitat of the open hill range where the wild deer herd occupy. The sheep grazing on the common grazing is selective and all crofters have apportionments which general are the favored areas for hill grazing.

The deer rely on the economic benefits of deer stalking as its principle income and also have a property which is encouraged to be taken by visiting field sports people.

No supplementary feeding of deer takes place on the estate.

The open hill range is separated from the crofting and in hand land, including amenity woodlands, by way of deer fencing which is linked to the same on the neighbouring properties.

The Estate has one full time person employed to manage deer who is DMQ level1 qualified and has trained in first aid.

Glencalvie

Interests	Hectares	% of Group Area
<i>Sporting Estate, Salomon fishing and holiday letting</i>	<u>1620</u>	<u>8%</u>

Glencalvie is the largest property within the group. However only a small land parcel of the estate falls into the ERDMG area and responsibility. The larger portion of the estate is located within the boundary of the North Ross Deer Management Group where it is an active member

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and much of its deer management objectives are formulated around the needs and objectives of this group.

There is an effective deer fence which runs in parallel with the boundary of the two deer groups and there is no inward or outward migration of the wild deer herd in this area.

The estate has a supplementary feeding policy within the main body of the estate and also provides a small amount of fodder a composite feed to the wild deer within the ERDMG.

Glencalvie are owners of a significant beat of the Carron river and the good ecological and environmental management of habitat within the rivers catchment area is of significant importance to the estate.

The estate employs two full time and one part time person to manage the deer. All hold DMQ level 1 and two hold DMQ level 2 certificates

Collective competence of group staff and contractors.

The group has eleven persons employed in the management of deer on a full and part time basis. of the eleven 7 persons are trained to DMQ level 2 with trained hunter status and 4 are trained to DMQ level 1. The target for the group is to ensure that through collaborative efforts all personnel engaged in deer management are trained to DMQ level 2.

Section 2 – The Aims & Objectives of Group Deer Management

Objectives for Collaborative Management

All participating members of the ERDMG will individually and collectively take a measure of responsibility for the welfare and management of the wild deer population within the boundaries of the group area. This should be done in a sustainable way and in consideration with the natural environment and habitat that forms the base of the deer hefting areas.

This is primarily made up of the open hill range of mixed heather moorland, blanket bog, peatlands and localised use of woodland to provide shelter and mixed environment for the deer use.

These types of habitat are naturally favorable land types for both Red & Roe deer and particularly in this group's case, the relatively low height of the hill ranges hosting wild deer combined with the local climatic conditions that prevail within the Inner Moray Firth area with a low average rainfall and lower than average periods of snow cover on the land provides for habitat which wild deer populations are given to thriving on.

Given the above all members of the group recognize that the management of the group wild deer population requires commitment in terms of resource to ensure that the population is maintained at a level which allows the continuing habitat conditions and levels of bio diversity to be maintained or improved whilst not impacting negatively on the other land uses and users who share the open group range whilst also ensuring that there are no significant failures to the private or public interest within the group boundaries.

The average annual cull within the group area over the last 10 years is 204 deer of all species. This equates to a deer cull per 100 hectare of 1. At this point there is insufficient data available on annual counts to measure the population density per hectare but the anecdotal evidence which is based on the last actual SNH deer count would suggest that the density per hectare is 12 deer on the open hill range. During the lifespan of this deer plan we will be in a position to more accurately measure this.

Proactive and positive deer management has a direct bearing on the provision of local employment and economic stimulus to the communities bounded by the group. Employment provided in the management of wild deer both directly and indirectly makes an extremely valuable contribution to the local economy.

A large proportion of the economic benefits are derived from the letting of much of the deer stalking on a commercial basis with 5 of the 6 group members stating that deer is the fundamental underwriter of staff costs in relation to the sustainable management of what is a valuable wild resource.

Sustainable Deer Management

Sustainable Deer Management can be best described as the management of wild deer to obtain the optimum mix of benefit, economically and environmentally whilst giving regard to the people and communities and the habitat range impacted by deer.

The overarching aim of the ERDMG is to ensure that the populations of wild deer found within the group area are managed sustainably for the economic, cultural and ecological benefit which should be combined with delivery of public benefit.

This will be done by all members of the group who will ensure that proper management of the wild deer is undertaken to ensure the health of the deer, the protection of the local ecology and natural environment and to deliver continuity for jobs and services which revolve around wild deer.

All persons engaged in deer management within and through the group will undertake proper recognized training wherever it is required and all persons charged with culling deer will possess a recognized industry qualification with the minimum requirement being Deer Management Qualification Level 1(DMQ1).

Annual culls will be carried out efficiently and professionally whilst taking due regard for the welfare of the deer and for the safety of the general public. This will be guided by use of the Scottish Government approved Code of Deer Management along with the use of best practice guides produced by Scottish Natural Heritage or other organisations as statutorily authorised.

Much of the impetus for the creation of a formal plan for this group comes in the wake of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee Enquiry recommendation that DMG's have an effective and environmentally responsible management plan in place by the end of 2016. Further recommendations stated that the work of DMGs should be open, transparent, inclusive and publicly accountable and that DMPs should be publicly available.

The deer management plan for this group will be made available on a group web page linked to the Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG) website. It will also be circulated to the community councils along with other community and public interest groups connected to the geographic group area.

High Standards of Deer management competency.

The group recognises the need for high standards of competence within the deer management sector and accordingly within the ERDMG. This ensures that the group contribute to delivering higher standards of competence in deer management

A training policy will be adopted whereby the group will ensure through its members that all those involved in the management of deer possess a suitably recognised qualification and

there will be a clear objective to ensure that all those engaged in the management of deer within the group are working towards DMQ level 2.

The potential for training delivery, via the group will be identified and pursued including any possibilities for training through public funding.

Given the above, it should however be recognised that staff within the DMG area already have a wide variety of other qualifications and certificates covering other aspects of their work. These include ATV, Argocat, First Aid, Chainsaw, Health & safety. There is a strong ethos of training and staff improvement across many of the properties within the DMG.

Deer welfare is of fundamental importance to the DMG. it is recognised by the group that robust deer recruitment counts plays an important part in understanding the measurement of the welfare of the wild deer within the group range and will be undertaking an annual recruitment count.

The figure produced will have an important part to play in regard to the population modelling of the deer within the group area. Deer larder weights will continue to be recorded and used as a tool in identifying the overall health and welfare of the wild deer.

Information gleaned by the group members on natural deer mortality will also assist in helping the group provide a robust population modelling procedure linked to the habitat and environment within the wider group area.

Venison

The retail sales of venison are currently going through a period of growth in the home market. Great efforts have been made by Scottish Quality Wild Venison (SQWV) to place the product in the housewives eye and we now have periods when the demand is struggling to be met. The ERDMG currently culls an average of 220+ carcasses per annum.

The larder facilities within the management group members vary within the acceptable scale and each member has their own vision for their facilities. However this is negated somewhat as Ardgay Game, who is now one of the leading independent game dealers and purveyors of wild venison operating in Scotland have a purpose built handling and processing unit based in Ardgay.

This is less than 6 miles from four of the six group members and it is common practice for some of these members to transport carcasses directly to Ardgay game facilities on completion of carcass dressing. This represents a significant saving in providing facilities, their maintenance, running and upkeep as well as reduced carbon emissions. All group members recognise that Ardgay game is a significant employer in terms of the local community and therefore there are mutual benefits in the current operating structures.

Land Use Objectives

Agricultural Land

Although the 10 year cull records for the group show a minimal return of Roe deer it is known that on the improved agricultural land to the south of the deer group, there are pockets of Roe deer which may cause impact damage to cereal crops. Current group members report minimal damage and impact to agricultural activities from deer. This will be due in part to the investment in fencing by group members to protect productive land. Within the group boundaries deer and sheep live in harmony and with little impacted consequence being seen. This is mitigated by stock management on the hill range where sheep are moved onto the lower grassland and improved hill ground during the summer & autumn months. It should also be noted that the sheep & deer density numbers are held at reasonably low density within the group area.

As a beneficial consequence of the newly introduced habitat monitoring of both species (instigated autumn 2015) members will over time be enabled to understand fully the impacts of agricultural livestock in comparison to the wild deer herd on the natural environment within the group and it may be that their objectives for both will be amended.

Crofting

The group members to the North of the group area (Gledfield, Dounie & Gruinards) which are based in the Carron basin have instances of shared land use where the deer have a shared use of crofting common grazing grounds. In practice this has limited impact on the wild deer population and it is understood from local knowledge that there is minimal evidence of deer being shot on croft land. Almost all the croft ground within the group area is protected by deer fencing either as direct control or inadvertently where croft land is bounded by enclosed woodland. Members of the group impacted by crofting land tenure have rigorous fencing maintenance schedules within the individual estate management objective which harmonies with the objective of the deer management group

Forestry

The following table provides information taken from the National Forest Inventory which identifies forestry interests within the group area including woodland type and % of cover in terms of the groups overall area. This includes the woodland interests of the group members where it exists.

The group area has a sizeable area of land under woodland with this being predominantly divided between the public forestry body, Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) who at this juncture are not members of the group (but discussion on their membership is ongoing) and private forestry interests of shared ownership (but joint management) to the north east of the group area. Attempts have been made to engage with the management organisation of this woodland area, including the issuing of a public interest questionnaire but at the time of the draft plan production we have not had a response.

The group would welcome membership of both the public and private forestry interests within the group area.

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Woodland Type	Area (Hectares)	Area as a % of group
Broadleaved	153	
Conifer	2681	
Felled & Ground Prep	306	
Young Trees	247	
Assumed woodland	311	
Other	55	
Total	3742	19%

It is recognised that the majority of the woodlands detailed above are enclosed with fencing which is generally deer proof but there will undoubtedly be inward and outward migration of wild deer from these woodlands. All group members have a responsibility to ensure that deer fencing, where it has an impact on the deer group plan is maintained in deer proof condition.

Two individual group members have recently created native woodland areas under the most recent SRDP program. Both of these areas are securely fenced with new deer fencing.

Group members will ensure that consideration is given to the creation of native woodland cover where habitat and the wider objectives of the individual estate management policies allow.

The group members collectively have over the last 20 years created new native woodland extending to almost 1000Ha which contributes to the national objectives and targets for woodland creation. The group through its individual members will continue to assess opportunities for woodland creation and where this fits with the overall objectives of the individual members woodland will be created. Where match funding can be secured, the DMG will undertake to quantify the remaining scope for additional woodland within the group and undertake a strategic review of where this might best serve both the public, group and individual members interests

It is recognised that within the group geographical area there are 800 Ha of native woodland where there is herbivore pressure recorded as medium or high. In most of these areas there are little or no deer numbers present. The main land use of this land area is through crofting. The group will engage with local grazing committees wherever possible to assist in reducing any grazing pressure caused by deer and consider opportunities for reducing overall herbivore pressure.

One group member has small areas of unfenced conifer woodland which has been opened to provide shelter and alternative habitat for the wild deer. This native woodland is largely Scot

Pine and will be retained for the long term. Regeneration opportunities within this woodland are currently limited due to the almost complete woodland canopy at present. Given that the largest proportion of woodland is owned out with current group membership and is of a commercial nature it is unlikely that there will be significant tree habitat open to wild deer for at least 20 years.

Within the deer group area there are pockets of native woodland cover. Most of this cover sits out with the enclosed open hill range where the main deer populous are located. However as part of the DMP these areas, most of which are regulated for in the working interests of group members, and the management of them will also become a group collaborative management task. Where match funding can be secured, the group will undertake to review the management of these native woodlands, monitor their current condition and develop and programme to secure their long term management

The management priority for woodlands in the area will be to secure and improve the condition of designated and ancient woodlands, and to try and improve connectivity of these where possible. Where necessary the group through the individual members will encourage the use of deer fencing where woodland creation is being carried out.

Habitat assessment

Land Cover Scotland map (LCS 88) shows that the habitat of the group area is diverse with a range of cover present. The larger cover areas are Heather moorland at 8450 ha, Blanket bog and peatlands at 6545 ha, woodland cover at 3700ha and unproved grassland at 1286 ha. other habitat such as mountain vegetation (139ha), recently ploughed land (360ha), coarse grassland, water, quarries and bracken can be found but in localised small areas across the group area.

Deer are dependent on the habitat as well as impacting on it. By measuring and recording the impacts of deer on habitat condition, it makes it easier to monitor whether land management objectives are being achieved. There are agricultural activities taking place across reasonable areas of the wild deer range which will be able to be evaluated during the life span of this plan through the monitoring program which is now in place.

The group will manage deer impacts on the habitat by maintaining an agreed deer density per square Km, by the use of deer fencing if necessary and also by managing other livestock interests within their individual units to ensure that impacts are mitigated wherever possible.

There are also public objectives associated with land, either through designated site status or areas where biodiversity is felt to be particularly important. Ongoing assessment will be carried out by group members and the collected data will be shared amongst group members in order to identify any areas facing increased pressure and steps will be taken to mitigate any negative impacts by implementing appropriate management processes.

The two main upland habitats will be monitored for herbivore impact: heather moorland as this is likely to provide winter fodder for deer and thereby have a real impact on their winter survival and blanket bog, as this habitat is fragile and most commonly impacted by trampling.

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The group recognise that they have a responsibility to improve carbon storage. They recognise that the existing woodland and moorland habitat serves a very necessary purpose in this respect. The group will monitor conditions throughout the duration of the plan and will identify opportunities to increase the group's carbon storage capacity through various means such as peatland restoration and the creation of new woodlands. Where match funding can be secured, the group will instigate a study of the potential for peatland restoration and provide information for SRDP scheme applications where appropriate

All members of the group will ensure responsible muirburn and will follow statutory guidance whilst working with other land use objectives to ensure that the habitat environment of the group remains in good condition. The group will avoid the burning of moorland in areas of deep peat.

Peatland damage across the group area is not considered to be a medium or high risk, however restoration opportunities are being explored by the group through the individual group members and where possible support through the SRPD funding schemes will be sought to assist in peatland restoration.

Some of the group members are already active through their wider estate interests in river basin management and the group consulted with two fisheries trusts during the production of this plan. All group members recognise the need for good river basin and water catchment management and are willing contributors in the efforts to sustain the river basin management within the DMG area.

Designated and Protected sites

Special Area of Conservation (SAC). In the north east corner the group boundary is linked to the Kyle of Sutherland, the confluence that merges the central Sutherland rivers. The Oykel SAC stretches onto the group geographical area at this point and the extent within the group boundaries is 2.4ha. This area incorporated is agricultural land and is out with the area recognised as the range of the group's wild deer population.

Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The Struie Channels SSSI is situated on either side of the B9175 Struie road which acts as the group boundary. The SSSI is almost all found on the eastern side of the roadway. The host area is under the ownership of FCS who are currently not members of the group. Dialog is underway to encourage this public landowner to join the group.

Special Protection Area (SPA). The Morangie Forest SPA bounds the group area at the south east of the group area. The SPA focuses on the survival of a small population of Capercaillie. The predominant land cover within the SPA is woodland and the designation extends only 4ha into the group area on land owned by the FCS.

National Scenic Area (NSA). The boundary of the Dornoch firth national scenic area (NSA) inter links with the boundary of the ERDMG geographical area and the fringe of the group in this area is included within the NSA. The NSA special qualities are the distinctive and contrasting outlooks to the east and west and include;

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diversity of woodland cover

Tranquil and undeveloped coastline

Inhabited surrounds with a wider backdrop of hills and Muir.

The ERDMP worked into practice plays a role in enhancing many of the qualities that are highlighted within the NSA. Forestry and habitat form a big part of the groups management plan and therefore the group has already encapsulated how it will delivery on maintaining the favorable condition of the NSA.

Economic benefits

The group recognises that there are economic benefits to be derived from the wild deer herd both for individual members and for the wider community. The group will pro-actively promote the use of local services and industries that are in a position to support the deer groups activities.

The group members currently cull an average of 67 Red deer stags per annum . All of these stags are shot with sporting guests and there is significant economic benefit to the local community as well as the group members through the letting of stag stalking to sporting guests. It is thought that the letting of the stalking and the accommodation provision for those who come to stalk provides a minimum income to the local area over a 5-6 week period in the autumn of around £40,000

Public Benefit

There are many ways in which to measure the public benefit of wild deer in Scotland. Red deer are recognised as an integral component of the land management mosaic within upland areas. Their revenue producing capability provides a very direct benefit in the maintenance and support of fragile rural communities through direct and secondary employment.

Wild deer have economic impacts on not just the businesses which hold a direct responsibility for their welfare and good management but also for the wider rural communities where wild deer can be found. Throughout the year people from outwith these communities have an engagement with deer which does directly impact on both the deer and these communities and this provides positive benefits but also has the potential to deliver some negatives. This plan is formulated on the basis of minimising the potential of negative impacts.

As part of the process of evaluating public benefit the group recognise that the current deer management structure within the uplands of Scotland provides significant benefit to the public in that the self-regulation, whilst not completely without weakness, has served the industry well, particularly over the last 20+ years when the structure and framework has improved through the hard work and commitment of the ADMG who have been aided and guided by the Deer Commission and now SNH. The alternative of state controlled DMG system would add significant costs to the public purse whilst not particularly making a significant difference on the ground.

Easter Ross Deer Management Group

The good welfare of deer both at individual animal and herd levels can provide excellent public benefits and the group through this management plan will endeavour to monitor the health of the deer herd to protect vulnerable animals and through selective culling maintain a balanced cross aged herd.

By managing the deer numbers and maintaining the current low density levels the group will ensure the habitat conditions within the group area retain and improve their favourable status and so ensure a continuing resilient food chain for the wild deer herd and thereby the vulnerability of the deer in harsh environmental conditions.

As a part of the consultation process for the compilation of this plan LCS Ltd sent 30 qualitative questionnaires to community councils, community groups and bodies along with land occupiers and grazing committees within the group boundary. From the 28 sent out there was a response from 2 of the 3 community councils and 3 other returns. Whilst recognising the importance of public engagement with the general public and also recognising that there is a desire for there to be a higher level of engagement with the general public to ensure the maximum public benefit from the wild deer in Scotland, it could be assumed from the level of returns that there is a satisfaction in the current performance and actions of the deer management group.

Broadly the responses received were of a positive nature toward the current system of deer management although given the small number of returns received the group is intent on undertaking the following to raise the profile of deer and their benefits within the group area.

The group will increase its engagement with other land holders within the groups geographical area. It will attempt to improve the recruitment of its direct membership, particularly with the public and private forestry land owners and agricultural property occupiers who have direct impacts with deer.

It will form a line of communication with community councils along with individuals and community groups who have an interest in the work of the group and all community councils will be invited to attend DMG meetings.

The minutes of all meetings will be published on the ERDMG web page which is linked from the ADMG website, as will be the ratified Deer Group plan along with any other relevant information relating the group and deer management within it.

Wild Deer & Road Traffic Incidents

The ERDMG is bounded significantly by Public roads on three sides. Two of these roads are single track, unclassified and not through roads (Ardross to Strathruisdale) & (Ardgay to Croick). The nature and structure of these two roads is such that traffic speed is ordinarily restricted to significantly below the national speed limits. It is also recognised that the traffic

Easter Ross Deer Management Group

using these roads is fundamentally local and there is therefore a greater understanding of the potential for road vehicle collisions with deer of all three species. The group encourages the reporting of any such incidents and is not aware of any problems in regard to deer encroaching the highways leading to collisions.

The B9176 Struie road acts as the boundary for the group. It is deer fenced for its entirety on either one or two sides with the exception of where it passes through FCS Scotland land which has a cattle grid on its boundary to tie in with the woodland boundary fencing. Although there are deer on the “outside” of the boundary fence, their numbers are very limited with the possible exception of within the FCS area. The group is not aware of any road traffic incidents relating to deer but within the group's proposed communications activities there will be liaison between the group and Police Scotland on an occasional basis and deer related RTAs will be included on any meeting agendas. Maintaining the east boundary fence will be key to maintaining the current low incidence of DVCs and the DMG will consider and plan for its maintenance.

Communications Policy

The ERDMG is committed to the transparent communication of all relevant information to its members, to government agencies and to the public more widely, with the caveat that some sensitive data will be distributed to group members only.

The primary source of information about the Group will be on the Association of Deer Management Groups' (ADMG) website, on which all information relevant to the group can be located. This will include the Deer Management Plan and associated maps, a constitution, minutes of group meetings, and population models. All local Community Councils, Common Grazing Committees and other relevant interests will be made aware of meetings in advance, and invited to contribute to the agenda for these.

When appropriate, the Group will also publish its work, management and articles of interest within the local newspapers.

The points of contact for the group will be the Secretary and the Chairperson.

The communications policy will be reviewed on a regular basis to take into account the needs of the DMG.

Section 3, Culling & Census information etc.

Deer Populations

The principle species of deer which is resident within the group area is Red deer. There are very small numbers of roe deer to the south and north and also small pockets of Sika deer. The group has a policy of eradication of sika deer as a non-native species. However it is recognised that there is a demand for the sporting hunting of Sika deer and where this exists group members are encouraged to utilise this whilst ensuring that their actions are not providing encouragement of the expansion of the Sika range. This objective should not necessarily impact on the groups primary management objectives as in most cases evidence of roe and Sika deer are generally encountered in areas that lie out with the groups almost totally enclosed wild deer range. The evidence of Sika deer on the groups fringes provides a motivation for the group to ensure that the existing deer fencing is maintained.

The ERDMG is almost unique amongst deer management groups in that its boundaries are almost fully enclosed by deer fencing; it is in effect a closed group. This provides that where management plans in regard to culls which are based on accurate counting of deer and also recording of recruitment numbers are adhered to the deer density within the deer group boundaries should show little by variation on a year by year basis. It is vitally important to the group that the boundary fence is maintained and each member should bear the responsibility for its own area. Any significant breaches in the boundary fencing should be reported via the group secretary and dialog between members should ensure for speedy repairs.

Red Deer Counts (Previous 5 years)

Year	Strathruisdale		Midfearn		Gledfield		Dounie		Gruinards		Glencalvie		Totals
Ha	4352		5260		2825		600		1782		1620		16379
	stags	others	S	O	S	O	S	O	S	O	S	O	
2008	142	420	103	287	91	268	73	45	71	328	8	33	1778
Stags	142		103		91		73		71		8		488
Other		420		287		268		45		328		33	1290
Density Per Sq KM													<u>11.96</u>

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Group Cull Figures (9 years)

	<u>Stag In</u>	<u>Stag Out</u>	<u>Hind In</u>	<u>Hind Out</u>	<u>Calf</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>2006-07</u>	<u>62</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>104</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>42</u>	<u>212</u>
<u>2007-08</u>	<u>70</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>95</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>203</u>
<u>2008-09</u>	<u>57</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>120</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>41</u>	<u>218</u>
<u>2009-10</u>	<u>69</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>125</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>51</u>	<u>248</u>
<u>2010-11</u>	<u>65</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>140</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>227</u>
<u>2011-12</u>	<u>66</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>135</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>228</u>
<u>2012-13</u>	<u>67</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>125</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>216</u>
<u>2013-14</u>	<u>65</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>106</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>38</u>	<u>210</u>
<u>2014-15</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>149</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>56</u>	<u>286</u>
<u>2015-16</u>	<u>71</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>166</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>38</u>	<u>275</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>672</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>1265</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>368</u>	<u>2323</u>
<u>Average</u>	<u>67</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>127</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>37</u>	<u>222</u>

As can be derived from the table, the culling figures have generally been stable with the average cull having little variation from the yearly cull figures. With regard to the hind cull, some of the years showing lower than average culls can be linked to years with periods of severe winter weather which reflected on a higher than normal winter mortality.

There is no doubt that one of the main reasons for a continuing consistency in yearly culling average can in a large way be attributed to the lack of inward or outward migration of the wild deer in the group area.

There are sporadic cull return records from private forestry interests within the group area who do not partake in group membership. These deer have been culled out with the current recognised open hill range which is secured by deer fencing. Where figures have been submitted they account for on average 8-9% of the deer cull.

Roe & Sika deer Populations

There is little evidence of roe deer presence within the main open hill group area. There are pockets of roe deer to the south of the group on the improved arable farmland. The Group take the view that roe deer should be managed and where there is evidence of damage to crops, trees or habitat the policy will be for low population retention.

Small pockets of Sika deer are located across the group area but mainly in the north & south where they are found on the edge of the open hill range and in woodland. The Group have a policy of eradication of Sika given that they are an invasive species. However there can be a demand for stalking of Sika stags and whilst maintaining the Group's policy, the group members are encouraged to maximize this economic benefit.

Appendix

1. Group Constitution
2. Population Model
3. Group Maps (provided by SNH)
 - a. Land Cover Scotland (LCS 88)
 - b. National Woodland Scotland Herbivore Pressure
 - c. Woodland Creation Schemes
 - d. National Forest Inventory Woodlands
 - e. Designated Sites

EASTER ROSS DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP **CONSTITUTION**



NOVEMBER 1ST 2015.

Name

The Group shall be called the **Easter Ross Deer Management Group**.

The area covered by the group is shown on the map attached as the final page of this document. The boundary may be open to amendment should the Group so decide.

Objectives

The Group's objective is to promote the sustainable management of the native deer species within the Group's area.

The Group will:

- Safeguard and promote deer welfare.
- Maintain a balance between the deer and their habitat, this balance being appropriate to the delivery of individual objectives.
- Fulfill the sporting and venison production requirements as set out in the Deer Management Plan.
- Allow for the effective delivery of other land use objectives and outputs.

The Group fully endorses the SNH Code of Practice on Deer Management which defines sustainable management in economic, environmental and social terms.

Membership

Membership of the Group will be open to all Landowners, Occupiers or Managers with a significant deer management interest over land within the Easter Ross Deer Management Area.

New Members will be selected and admitted at the sole discretion of the existing membership.

At the discretion of the Members, other interested parties including Landowners and Land Managers may join the Group as Associate Members.

Representatives from relevant Public Bodies, NGO's and Local Bodies may be invited to attend meetings of the Group.

Members Obligations

Members agree to support the effective running of the group by:

- Attending or being represented at Group meetings.
- Supplying information required for the administration of the Group.
- Supplying information required for the writing and reviewing of the Group Deer Management Plan and for the other purposes of the Group.
- Paying an annual subscription to the Easter Ross Deer Management Group at such rates as may be agreed.
- Submitting annual returns of deer culled to SNH
- Collaborating with other members and other relevant interests including other Deer Management Groups or Sub-Groups.

- Advising the Group of any relevant changes in terms of deer management or land ownership or management in respect of their individual deer management areas.
- Carrying out deer management in accordance with all relevant legislation, the SNH Code of Good Practice and Wild Deer Best Practice.
- Undertaking relevant training and maintaining the highest level of individual skill and personal development in all matters relating to deer management.
- Following the agreed Deer Management Plan.

Office Bearers.

Office bearers will comprise a Chairman and, if required, Vice Chairman, who shall be elected annually at the Group AGM. Re-election on a rolling basis is permitted with no restriction on the period of time that an office bearer may serve.

The administrative positions of Secretary and Treasurer (which may be combined) and external Auditor are appointed positions and such appointments and any terms of appointment shall be for approval annually at the Group AGM.

Composition and Voting arrangements.

Membership shall consist of one voting representative from each estate or other landowner in the Group's area; for this purpose, 'estate' shall be interpreted as land managed as a single unit. Such representatives shall be nominated by the owner. An alternative

may be nominated by the member to attend and vote at any meeting.

There will be a commitment to reaching Group decisions through consensus as opposed to taking a vote.

Where a vote is deemed to be required for Group business, each member of the Group (as defined above) shall have one vote. In the event of an equality of votes, the Chairman of the meeting shall have a casting vote in addition to his/her own vote. All administrative decisions shall be by a majority of those present and voting, and shall be binding on all members of the Group.

In the event that the Chairman is absent from any meeting, the Vice-Chairman shall take the Chair.

A representative of:

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)

The Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG) and

Others by invitation shall be invited to attend meetings of the group but shall not have a vote. The Group may co-opt representatives of other interests or invite such to attend meetings of the Group; such representatives shall have no vote.

Alterations to the Constitution

Alterations to this Constitution shall be made only at a General Meeting of the members of the Group holding voting rights. The notice calling such a meeting shall state the alterations proposed. An alteration to the Constitution shall only come into effect on a

majority decision of two-thirds of those members holding such voting rights.

Meetings

The Group shall hold an Annual General Meeting (AGM), at which an Income and Expenditure Account to 31st March each year and a Budget for the forthcoming year shall be presented for approval by members. The annual records kept by the Treasurer will be inspected and presented to the Group at its AGM by an Auditor appointed by the Group. The Group shall meet at such other times as the Chairman may determine.

The Group shall, at least once a year, hold an open meeting to which all concerned with the management of deer in the Group's area shall be invited. At such meetings all matters pertaining to the objectives of the Group may be discussed, but all decisions shall be taken by the Group members, as defined in the Composition above.

Notice of all meetings shall be given by the Secretary at least twenty-one days prior to a meeting. Such notice shall state the time and place of the meeting and list the business to be discussed.

Spring Meeting

The principal deer management business of the Spring Meeting will be to undertake a systematic review of the previous season and to indicate sporting/cull requirements for the coming season. This will include:

- The analysis of culls achieved against cull targets set at the previous meeting

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- The analysis of remaining deer numbers, based on a census and such indirect monitoring as might be carried out by members
- A review of any current problems in the sub-area, based upon evidence gathered from monitoring procedures used by individual members. If necessary, these should be placed in an order of priority and a plan of action agreed upon.
- The setting of sporting requirements for the coming season
- Update Group Web-site to inform interested parties.

Members will submit their cull data to the Group in advance of the Spring Meeting in the format agreed by the Group.

Autumn Meeting

The main deer management business of the Autumn meeting will be the agreeing of cull targets amongst the membership for the coming winter/spring, taking into account the results of any recent information that may be relevant. Specifically, all information relating to habitat condition gathered during the previous season will be reviewed and, if applicable, target culls adjusted accordingly.

Finance and Administration

The Group shall be self financing and the subscription shall be set annually at the AGM. The basis of the subscription calculation shall be agreed by the Group and approved by members at the

AGM. Subscriptions shall be set at a rate sufficient to cover all operating expenses of the Group. Subscriptions will be payable at a date to be determined by the Group. Notwithstanding the above, the Group may apply for public grants, subsidies and other funds in order to fulfill the objectives of the Group.

The Treasurer will operate a Bank Account for the Group and all financial transactions will be made on this account. All withdrawals shall be counter signed by the Chairman or another nominated Group member, as agreed with the Group's bankers.

A financial statement will be prepared by an Auditor appointed by the Group and presented at the AGM for approval by Members.

In the event of funds being left upon the winding up of the Group, the disbursement of these funds will be determined by the Members.

Quorum

A quorum at the AGM and at Committee Meetings shall consist of not less than two thirds of the voting membership.

Proxies

Proxies must be made in writing to the Chairman at least 3 days prior to the AGM or any other Committee Meeting.

Liability and Insurance

The Easter Ross Deer Management Group carries no insurance cover and will accept no liability for the actions of any of its

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Members. Members will be required to carry personal liability and public liability insurance to indemnify themselves against any claim

which may arise against them in connection with any deer management activity which they undertake. (Personal liability cover can be obtained through membership of certain organizations, eg BASC SGA).

Conflict resolution

All Group members are encouraged to deal with disputes in the first instance with those parties concerned, be they other Group members, external parties or Government Agencies.

Failing that, the Chairman of the Group will seek to facilitate an agreement. This may involve the opportunity to air relevant issues at a meeting of the Group. A request to do this should be made in writing at least two weeks prior to any such meeting.

Any dispute relating to the Group Chairman will be considered by the Vice-Chairman of the Group.

All Group members are entitled to receive Group support in dealing with such issues.

The Easter Ross Deer Management Group reserves the right to suspend the membership of any member if it is judged that they are working against the interests of the Group as a whole.

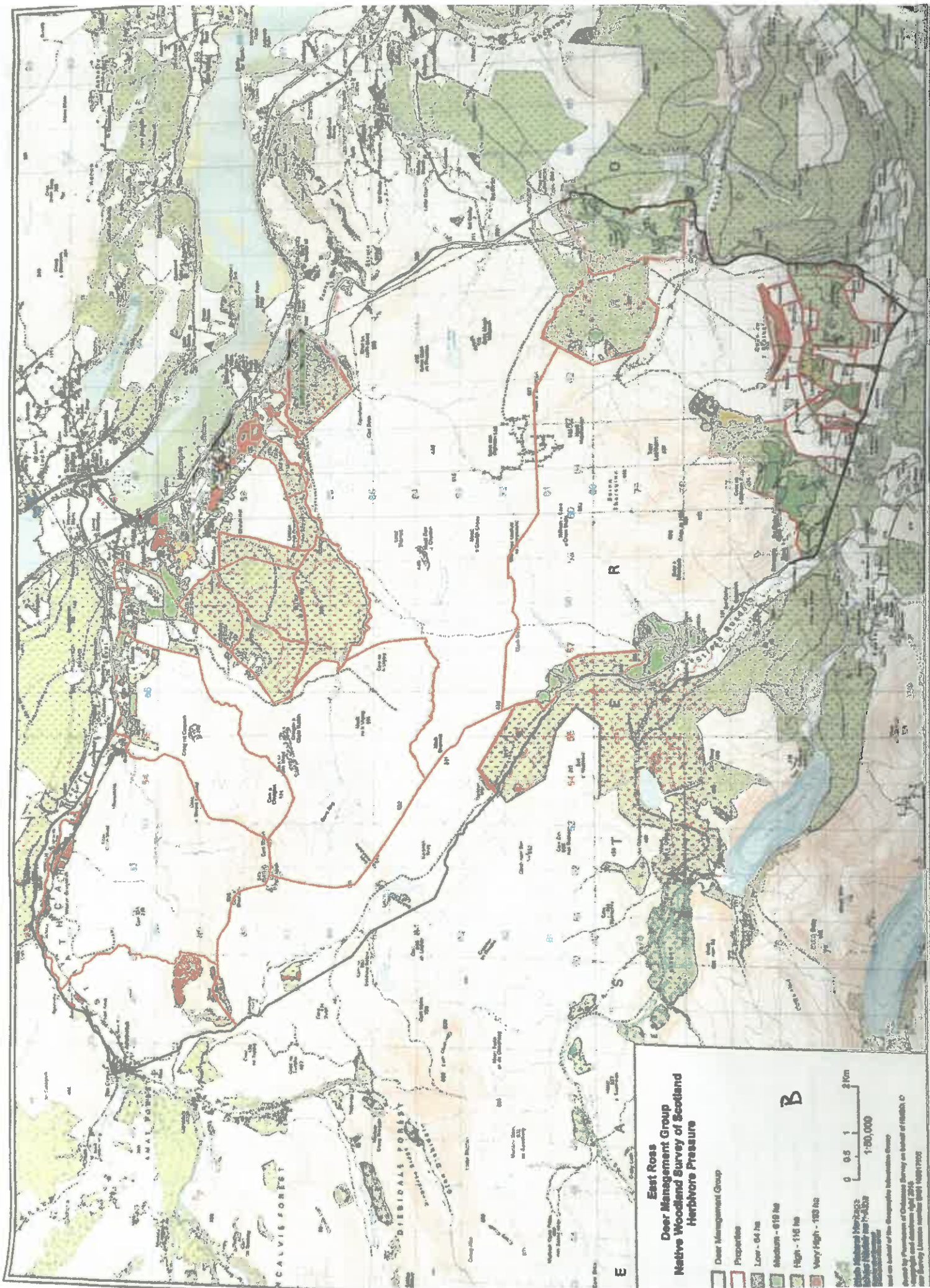
The views of ADMG or an independent expert agreed by the parties involved will be sought in any instances where disputes prove to be intractable. Such arbitration will be for guidance only and will still require a voluntary agreement.

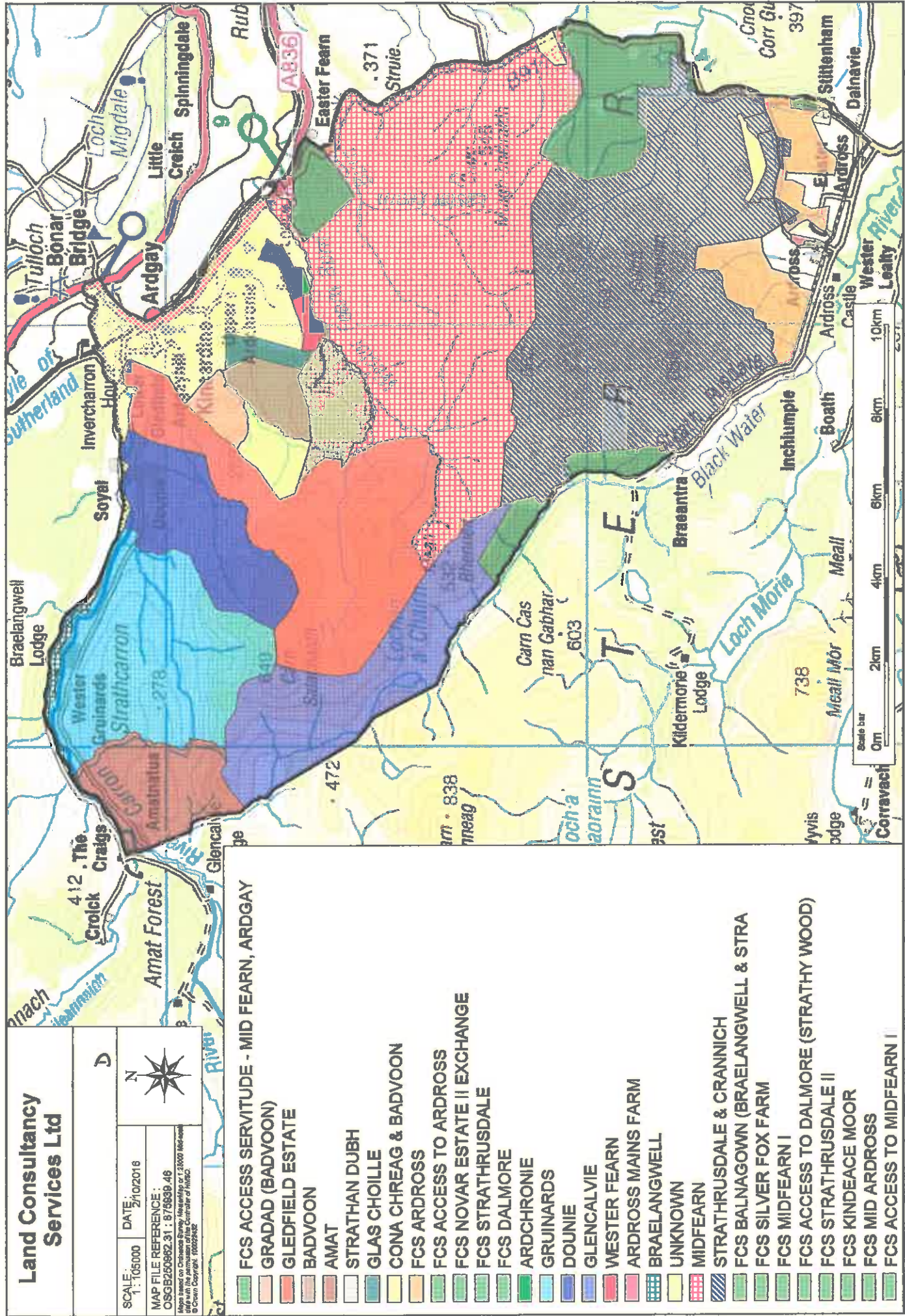
Storage of agreed membership information will be the responsibility of the Secretary, such information to be used solely for the administration of the Group, and stored in accordance with the law.

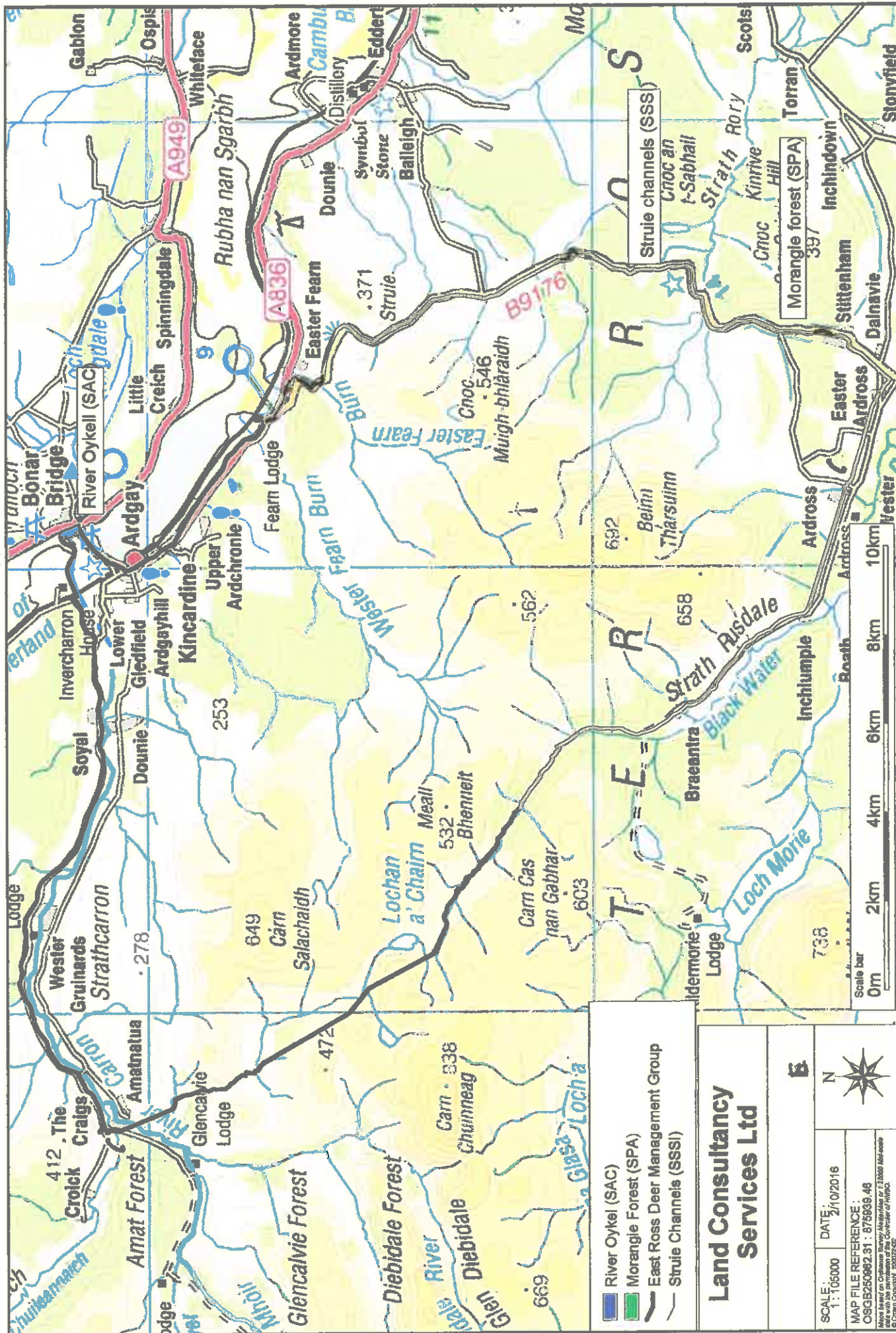
The Group shall determine such deer management and related data as will be required to fulfill the objectives of the Easter Ross Deer Management Group. Such data will be collected by all Members and submitted to the Secretary for storage and analysis and shall be regarded as the property of the Group.

East Ross Deer Management Group Population Model

East Ross Model	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Total	Area	Density
					16000	
2016 Spring Population	545	1334	343	2222		13.9
2016 Summer Population	717	1506	376	2598		
2016/17 Cull	70	350	100	520		
2016/17 Mortality	14	30	23	67		
2017 Spring Population	632	1125	254	2011		12.6
2017 Summer Population	759	1252	313	2324		
2017/18 Cull	70	350	100	520		
2017/18 Mortality	15	25	19	59		
2018 Spring Population	674	877	194	1745		10.9
2018 Summer Population	771	974	244	1989		
2018/19 Cull	70	350	100	520		
2019 Mortality	15	19	15	50		
2019 Spring Population	686	605	129	1419		8.9
2019 Summer Population	750	669	167	1587		
2019/20 Cull	70	100	100	270		
2020 Mortality	15	13	10	38		
2020 Spring Population	665	556	57	1278		8.0
2020 Summer Population	694	585	205	1483		
2020/21 Proposed Cull	70	70	25	165		
2021 Mortality	14	12	12	38		
2021 Spring Population	610	503	167	1280		
2021 Summer Population	694	587	205	1486		







ERDMG Working Plan & Action Points

OPERATION OF THE GROUP

The East Ross Deer Management Plan (ERDMP) main document has been assessed against the Deer Management Group (DMG) Benchmark document developed by the Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG). This analysis of present operations has defined the management processes in place which in turn has resulted in a series of recommended actions that will in the lifetime of this plan allow the group to meet the ADMG benchmark for a DMP.

Action points have been collated from Operation of the group and Public interest action section and are to be implemented over the lifetime of this plan with yearly reviews.

Area & Boundaries

Action Points

1.1 Ensure the adoption of a competent population model and operate appropriately with regular reviews and next steps in place if necessary.

Membership

Action Points

2.1 Invite both FCS & Fountain Forestry to join the group as full members. Encourage comment and participation from other smaller landowners and occupiers within the group area who are impacted by wild deer. Secure involvement of Glencalvie Estate

Meetings

Action Points

3.1 Invite to meetings local stakeholders, community leaders, Police and Governmental agencies and those who have interests in the management of deer that are both professional and community oriented. The participation of these agencies and individuals in group meetings would support delivery of a more focussed plan as well as the fourteen public interest actions.

3.2 Invite other significant land owners and occupiers to within the group area to attend meetings to allow any concerns regarding deer and enter into discussions to resolve any issues at a local level across the DMG area.. This to include inviting SNH, FCS and Police Scotland

4.3 Meetings will be delivered under the structures outlined in the constitution and encompassing all matters relating to the delivery of the group management plan.

Constitution & Finances

Action Points

4.1 Ratify the draft constitution at spring 2016 group meeting.

4.2 Group financial structures are to be agreed from those outlined in the constitution.

4.3 Identify if there are opportunities to add value to group assets through economic packages offered under support systems such as the Scottish regional development programme SRDP or the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund (ECAAF).

4.4 Group to agree on the level of cash reserves that are to be held as a minimum within the group bank account.

Deer Management Plan

Action Points

5.1 Complete plan in accordance with Benchmark report, review proposed ERDMP and seek adoption at spring 2016 meeting.

5.2 ERDMP to be subject to ongoing scrutiny and review in line with SNH BPG. Changes and next steps are to be achievable in set timeframes and agreed with all members.

5.3 Use of a five year population model which is derived from SNH BPG is to be subject to ongoing review with any changes made in line with accepted guidance from appropriate specialists. Ensure actual recruitment figures from counts of sample groups of hinds are used to maintain accuracy of model

5.4 Plan to include maps to illustrate detail including Woodland cover & condition. Additional maps to be added as required.

5.5 Sika deer are to be culled on an as seen basis as they are recognised as an invasive species. Roe deer to be managed in accordance with BPG and local population levels.

5.6 The group secretary is to manage next steps, time lines and individuals who are accountable in relation to the ongoing review of the DMP.

5.7 Develop contacts with community stakeholders, MSP's, local councilors, police and governmental agencies and invite to meetings as felt appropriate.

5.8 Record to be kept of all land management objectives within the group.

Code of Practice on Deer Management

Action Points

6.1 The code of practice on deer management will be delivered through implementation of this plan, and members are to ensure that all parties adhere to defined practices.

6.2 Ensure regular (every six months) analysis of the DMP to define ongoing improvements in line with SNH BPG.

6.3 The Code of practice on deer management is endorsed and adopted within the constitution and will underpin the DMP.

ADMG Principles of Collaboration

Action points

7.1 ERDMG shares a commitment to economically sustainable, vibrant and thriving communities that are engaged with regarding deer management within the group.

7.2 The group accepts that there is a diversity of management objectives and respect each other's objectives while recognizing the need to work in collaboration to further the aims of the group.

7.3 ERDMG commits to communicate openly with all relevant stakeholders.

7.4 There will be a commitment to recognise the rights of individual landowners to make reasonable changes in land use and agree steps including a review of the group DMP where necessary.

7.5 Wherever areas of disagreement arise between member's efforts will be made to undertake collaborative working practices in order to achieve a resolution.

Best Practice

Action points

8.1 Best Practice Guidelines provides the baseline for assessments of the DMP, and will be referred to in order to inform any next steps from ongoing reviews.

8.2 All amendments that are required to be made to the DMP must be in line with Best Practice Guidelines.

Data and evidence gathering - Deer Counts

Action Points

9.1 The group will carry out an annual deer count in collaboration with all members. This will be arranged under the guidance of the group secretary. The annual count is mandatory to all members.

9.2 In order to deliver robust population modelling that reflects habitat condition and good deer husbandry it is recommended that a helicopter count should be undertaken of the whole group in spring 2016. This should be considered thereafter on a 3 - 4 yearly period (supported by SRDP funding if possible).

9.3 Recruitment counting of sample groups of hinds and calves (late April/ early May) to be integrated so that an assessment can be made of deer population and health, post winter.

Data and evidence gathering – Culls

Action Points

10.1 Population models, actual and forecasted cull levels are to be updated yearly with recruitment and mortality data and amended if necessary.

10.2 Any changes to deer population density to be agreed in collaboration in a way that meets the needs of both sporting interest and the public interest outcomes.

Data and evidence gathering - Habitat Monitoring

Action Points

11.1 Habitat monitoring program to be expanded across all areas of the group. Habitat assessment points are available from SNH and are to be carried out over an agreed timeframe.

11.2 Sufficient resources are to be in place over the period of the DMP for the purpose of delivering habitat monitoring.

11.3 Habitat monitoring data to be collated and mapped by group secretary in order to identify changes and trends at landscape scale.

11.4 Group members to share information on changes to agricultural practices and stock numbers which may have an impact on habitat.

Competence & Training

Action Point

12.1 DMG members will seek to ensure that DMQ Level 1 and Trained Hunter status are the minimum group standard, and promotion of DMQ level 2 for appropriate staff would be undertaken in order to promote continued professional development (CPD).

12.2 Staff and contractors to be encouraged to take up opportunities in gaining deer management qualifications, and be better informed on the definition of trained hunter status. (Trained Hunter status can be through DMQ1 (later versions) or through a Wild game (large) Handling course) This should also be in line with a group training policy which will be in place in 2016.

12.3 Habitat assessments are a fundamental tool in defining the status of land cover in the ERDMG Staff should be trained and able to describe techniques and processes as well as describe specific outcomes from this process.

Carcass Handling Facilities & Venison Marketing

Action Points

13.1 In the short term all members to review handling and cooling facilities and investigate where improvements can be made following BPG

13.2 Group to consider a long term collaborative marketing strategy for venison that fits with the aims and objectives of Scottish Quality Wild Venison standards (SQWV) which exist to maintain, develop and promote quality assurance standards throughout the industry.

13.3 Group should investigate the merits of joining SQWV.

Communications

Action Point

14.1 A communications process has been outlined in the constitution and is to be used to promote ongoing business between meetings.

14.2 ERDMG meeting minutes are to be communicated to designated stakeholders, to be displayed on the ERDMG page of the ADMG website. Copy of the minutes to be circulated to the three community councils within the group area.

14.3 This DMP will be made available to the general public via ADMG after the group have ratified it. The public will then have the opportunity to make representations on the plan and these can then be actioned as felt appropriate within and agreed timeframe.

14.4 Avenues of communication to the wider public to be investigated, and to include areas such as newsletters, open meetings on members properties and through use of different online vehicles such as websites and social media accounts

DELIVERY OF PUBLIC INTEREST OUTCOMES

Environment

Contribute to the delivery of designated features into Favorable Condition

Action points

1.1 Provide appropriate resources over the period of this plan to monitor the small areas (<5h) of designated sites found within the group boundaries and carry out continual habitat assessments across the wider group area.

Contribute to the Scottish Government woodland expansion target of 25% woodland cover.

Action points

2.2 A review of existing potential woodland habitats would determine appropriate next steps with support from SRDP/ECAF for any future expansion

Manage deer to retain existing native woodland cover and improve woodland condition in the medium to long term.

Action points

3.1 Review existing Native woodland sites using maps and identify priorities for actions necessary that may encourage future regeneration.

3.2 Identify next steps to mitigate against herbivore impacts on open habitats that can be achieved through support mechanisms such as SRDP or ECAF.

3.3 Identify herbivore impacts on woodland areas within an agreed timeframe in order to identify whether further actions such as fencing, culling or diversionary feeding sites are required to promote woodland regeneration.

Monitor and manage deer impacts in the wider countryside (not improved agricultural land)

Action Points

4.1 Habitat assessment points, and recommended processes have been Actioned in Autumn 2015 and monitoring will be undertaken initially by third party contractors and will continue to form the benchmark for habitat management in the DMG.

4.2 A plan for the ongoing habitat monitoring will be in place in 2016 and identification of individuals within the group network will embark on a training programme in order that long term monitoring will be by the group directly.

4.2 Habitat assessment data to be used to support identification of grazing levels and whether changes are required on a site specific basis.

Improve Scotland's ability to store carbon by maintaining or improving ecosystem health

Action points

5.1 Carbon sensitive sites require to be identified using the Land Cover Scotland map, and this document will continue to be referred to for any changes to land management.

5.1 Data from habitat assessments can be used at estate or group level according to any future agreements. This data will be used to support changes to land management that can positively influence carbon storage.

5.2 Peatlands restoration while an important driver of carbon sequestration will be reviewed in the context of ensuring that natural capital for all species is maintained, and financial support using SRDP funding pathways would be sought if it was felt that restoration is to be an appropriate next step. The group undertakes to identify from aerial imagery where hill drains are located and will instigate drain blocking where this is necessary for site restoration if funding sources can be secured.

5.3 ERDMG will maintain the historical target deer density of 12 deer per sq km or less across the area. Any changes to this will be taken after consultations between ERDMG and the appropriate agencies.

5.4 Muirburn will be used in a manner that meets existing regulations and in a way that is compatible with maintain local environments in good condition. It would be advised that any burning of deep peatland sites is detrimental to maintaining them in good condition and could lead to long term negative impacts on biodiversity.

5.5 Any decisions to review woodland generation in the ERDMG area is to be taken with the appropriate advice from woodland specialists, and against a background of minimising any impacts on carbon storage and the protection of river basins.

The group will contribute to River Basin Management Planning where requested either as a group or as individuals.

Reduce or mitigate the risk of establishment of invasive non-native species (INNS)

Action points

6.1 Existing collaborative estate policies are in place for the removal of any Non Native species including Munjac and Sika through unrestricted cull practices. This policy will continue for the life of this plan.

6.2 Members are encouraged to collaborate on data relating to Sika deer, Roe deer and to manage as deemed appropriate.

6.3 The group is encouraged to discuss INNS data with SNH on a regular basis in order to provide a bigger picture in the region on species distribution.

Protect landscapes and historic features from deer and deer management activity

Action points

7.1 Any developments such as changes in land management, construction or other impacts on the landscape that may impact Historic and Cultural Features are to be assessed against current legislation guidance.

The DMG will access the HER Highland website to ascertain the location of historical and cultural features within the landscape and take action to ensure that management does not impact on their integrity.

The DMG will ensure that any deer fencing proposed is subject to the Joint Agency guidance on fencing Guidance.

ECONOMY

Optimise economic benefits of deer management in Scotland

Action Points

8.1 Discuss with local representatives the potential benefits that Deer have on local communities, and how that can be maximised to support the economic spinoffs for local businesses.

8.2 Review ways forward to identify the economic possibilities to be obtained by the group including any opportunities for collaboratively managing sporting and accommodation opportunities across the group through use of, and reference to the PACEC (2014) survey.

8.3 Look at ways in which to add value to group product such as venison via collaborative marketing.

8.4 Discuss ways to manage carcass handling including future sharing of a central handling unit.

Minimize the economic costs of deer management

Action Points

9.1 Review areas where management changes are potentially going to have a negative economic impact on the DMG and formulate a way forward that will help to alleviate those changes.

9.2 ERDMG to identify a process whereby capital investment in deer management and infrastructure can be quantified in a manner that is acceptable.

9.3 Review areas where management changes are potentially going to have a negative economic impact on the ERDMG and formulate a way forward that will help to alleviate those changes.

SOCIAL WELLBEING

Contribute to delivering higher standards of competence in deer management

Action Point

10.1 Review all staff training in regards to deer management so that within a reasonable timeframe to be set by ERDMG, all relevant staff will be trained to at least DMQ Level 1 and Trained Hunter status as a minimum group standard. Promotion of DMQ level 2 for appropriate staff would be undertaken in order to promote CPD.

10.2 All members of ERDMG to ensure that they have systems to keep training records up to date and to ensure employees and contractors are competent and comfortable in undertaking the core functions of their role.

10.3 All members of ERDMG to ensure that they have a suitable and sufficient risk assessment to control physical hazards.

10.4 All members to actively encourage staff to participate in further training in areas appropriate to their role.

Identify and promote opportunities contributing to public health and wellbeing benefits

Action Points

11.1 Group meetings are to be used to highlight any issues with Deer vehicle collisions and to look at ways in which risk can be mitigated.

11.2 All members are to have in place a policy of regular updates on issues that may impact staff, guest and public health. The primary issues are Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) of Deer and Lyme's disease, but may include other health risks such as operating in poor weather conditions, walking in difficult terrain and the appropriate use and deployment of weaponry.

11.3 All staff aware of any agreed policies on escalations necessary in the case of notifiable diseases.

11.4 The group are to discuss any safety issues and impacts on deer welfare with the appropriate Highland council outdoor access officer.

11.5 All group members are asked to review any local access issues and to work with the public in order to minimise any conflicts through provision of better information on the Scottish outdoor Access Code. Signage, websites and the hill phones initiative are all suggested ways of engaging with the public.

11.6 Food safety and carcass handling to be managed in line with BPG and current legislative guidance.

Ensure effective communication in deer management issues

Action Point

12.1 Group to formalise a communications policy with agreed stakeholders such as public agencies, community groups and nominated individuals.

12.2 Group to identify appropriate actions that have been driven by community concerns in relation to deer management.

12.3 Identify opportunities such as site visits to raise awareness of group activities with the wider public, community groups and recognised stakeholders.

WELFARE

Ensure Deer welfare is taken into account at individual animal and population level

Action Point

13.1 Review habitat status across the DMG (support may be available through SRDP) and identify ways in tandem with BPG on bringing sites into favorable condition status.

13.2 During culling operations, ensure reasonable care in line with BPG is maintained.

13.3 All members are to maintain appropriate records on the management of herbivores, communicate these to the group, and also to liaise with appropriate agencies so that steps are in place to ensure that animal husbandry is maintained.

13.4 The group is to work with land managers who are putting in place operations that may impact deer management and habitats, to ensure that steps are taken to mitigate any negative impacts.

13.5 The Group will periodically review the welfare of all deer within the group area with all members contributing to the collection of deer welfare data.

COLLABORATION & EFFECTIVE DEER MANAGEMENT PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION

Develop effective mechanisms to manage deer

Action Points

14.1 The group are to publish the agreed version of the East Ross Deer Management Plan in the spring of 2016 after review against the ADMG and PIA benchmarks.

14.2 Group secretary to assign role and responsibilities with achievable timelines for any given changes or actions resulting from plan reviews.

14.3 Minutes from DMG meetings to be made publically available through agreed channels.