

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EASTER ROSS DEER
MANAGEMENT GROUP, HELD ON FRIDAY 19th April 2019 AT 2.00 PM
AT MIDFEARN LODGE, ARDGAY.**

Present:

Mr Charlie Brooke	(Chairman)	Midfearn Estate
Mr Jim Gilmour		Gruinards Estate
Mr Alastair Harrington	(Vice Chair)	Strathrusdale Estate/Glencalvie
Mr Derick Macaskill		Forestry Commission
Mr Dell Ross		Midfearn Estate
Mr James Sawyer		Dounie Estate

In attendance:

Mr Sinclair Coghill (Scottish Natural Heritage)
Mr David Campbell (Land Consulting Services)
Mr Gordon Robertson (Secretary and Treasurer)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Richard Harrington (Strathrusdale Estate), Alex Hunter Dounie Estate), Tamara Lawton (Scottish Natural Heritage), Neil Cameron (Gledfield), Robert, Helen and Christopher Franklin (Gruinards Estate), and Michael Brown (Midfearn Estate).

2. Chairman's introduction

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Meeting.

3. Minutes of Meeting held on 06.04.2018

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 23rd November 2018, previously circulated, were approved.

**4. 2.
Action points from the previous Minutes.**

1. The Forestry Commission in Dingwall and will advise on potential and existing sites for Native Woodland creation, expansion and management, as well as commercial timber opportunities. GR will circulate.

2. Peatland Restoration opportunities under the Peatland Action Plan. It was agreed that individual estates should put forward separate applications of interest. GR will circulate details to Group members immediately following the meeting.

All other actions had been dealt with.

5. Management Plan. Working Plan Update

DC and GR had attended a meeting at Great Glen House (SNH Headquarters) with TL and SC to go through the Assessment of the ERDMG by SNH. Group members had been circulated with this document which had shown continued improvement. At the above meeting it was agreed that a number of amber assessments were to be changed to green. SC stated that he was pleased with the outcomes and the progress being made by ERDMG. The official Assessment still required to be 'signed off' by Chris Donald at SNH, but SC felt confident that this would happen without further amendment.

Three more years until the next Assessment.

All present agreed that an area that required immediate attention was the collection of data on **Recruitment and Mortality**. This will give the data required for the **Population Model** for the ERDMG Deer Management Plan and provide the **target cull for the next 5 years**.

CB urged that the data must be collected over the following 4 weeks and provided to DC by the 20th May 2019. DC confirmed that estates should be looking at last year's calves in order to get an accurate balance. SC stated that if the ERDMG could assess 300 hinds in total, and count their older calves, that this should be sufficient.

3.

JS pointed out that the very bad winter in 2017/18 had had a negative impact on recruitment. He agreed with DC and SC that further time spent analysing numbers

was required as deer did move to unusual places in extreme weather and that it can often be misleading when assumptions are made during extreme periods of weather. This spring will reveal the true picture

SC pointed out that hinds ovulated by 'condition not date' and the impact of the 2017/18 season will not have worked itself out until the very end of 2018.

CH concluded 1. Carry out Recruitment and Mortality Counts ASAP. **Action.**
All

2. Plan for a further helicopter count in 2020. **Action All.**

6. Habitat Assessment.

Dr Cathy Mayne had circulated an email prior to the meeting, as an update. 15 plots were still required and these would be completed by the end of the week. This will mean that ERDMG will have 60 dwarf-heath shrub and 60 blanket bog plots in total.

In summary the Group's area has generally widespread low impacts with the expected hotspots caused by feeding, shelter or exposure or a combination of the foregoing.

ERDMG ground has a relatively acid substrate and a high proportion of peat based habitats which are not particularly nutritious. Thus 'sweet spots' become even more attractive to deer.

In terms of high impact, the plantation at Gledfield stands out. The periphery of the plantation is badly damaged by browsing and trampling. The deer population are mobile, bolstered by neighbouring deer during the winter months. It could be that Gledfield might be considered as a 'sacrificial area'. SC confirmed that this could be a possibility provided hind numbers were being reduced. This matter will be discussed at the next meeting.

Full details in report to follow.

CM's costs will be slightly higher than anticipated but all agreed that we were delighted with her input and her engagement with staff and owners.

CB, on behalf of the Group, repeated thanks to the Franklin family for their generous provision of accommodation for CM during her time carrying out the Habitat work.

The Meeting agreed that CM should be asked to come back every 3 years to assist with monitoring and recording.

4.

7. Scottish Natural Heritage

SC highlighted the option for members to apply for a **Moorland Management for Deer Grant** (Scottish Government Rural Payments and Services Department). Members of the Group are in a good position to qualify as the Group now has plots established, training in interpretation of data, lists of plants and a programme to measure and record the quadrats every 2-3 years.

SC also reported that in addition to the Scottish Government's Deer Management Review, a Deer Working Group has also been set up to look at the management of Deer throughout the country. This is an independent Committee of four whose task is to examine the current issues over standards of deer management and to recommend changes to help resolve these issues in ways to promote sustainable deer management in Scotland. Their remit covers all deer species. Unfortunately the Chair, Simon Pepper has died. The other three members are Andrew Barbour, Robin Callender and Dr Jayne Glass. The two external Advisers are Richard Cooke (ADMG) and Malcolm Combe (Aberdeen University). SC reported that evidence is being taken but that not much feed-back has been received.

8. Deer Cull Report

The cull figures had been circulated. **It was agreed that the ERDMG would be paying its fee to the ADMG for the first time this spring,** based upon the standard charges per estate per deer shot. (£4 per Stag (including Sika), £2 per hind (including Sika), £1 Calves (including Sika) and £1 Other species (Roe, Fallow, etc. of both sexes and including calves). Return to ADMG to be completed. **Action GR**

ADMG promotes ERDMG and hosts our Website. Also provides information and professional guidance and represents Deer Groups interests at the Scottish Government and in the wider world. This year funds were also provided in the form of a Health Check prior to the Assessment by SNH. ADMG liaised with SNH and agreed the £1,800 grant to each Group for Habitat Assessment Work. (Half of Dr Cathy Mayne's fee)

5.

9. Finance

GR to circulate detailed breakdown of the annual costs due prior to the next meeting. **Action GR**

10.AOCB

None

11.Date of next Meeting.

It was hoped that the next meeting would take place in June 2019 once the Recruitment and Mortality figures were to hand.

The Meeting closed at 3.00 pm.

ACTIONS

1. Circulate members with Forestry Commission feedback on potential woodland sites within ERDMG **Action GR**
2. Peatland Action Plan. Circulate Group members with details for applying to join the scheme. **Action GR**
3. Undertake Recruitment and Mortality count by 20th May **Action All**
4. Make returns of deer culled to ADMG **Action GR**
5. Present annual budget proposal prior to next Meeting **Action GR**