

Subject: Mid-West DMG AGM 2020  
Date: 29 October 2020  
Time: 4.00pm  
Location: Virtual

## MINUTES

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### 1.0 Attendance and Apologies

Roddie welcomes all.

#### Apologies

Hamish McCorquodale  
Jonny Stevenson  
Julia Stoddart  
Jamie Hendry  
Cameron Loudon  
Dougie Langland  
Mike Kenny  
John Jackson  
Ian Sutherland

#### Attending

Roddie Feilden (Chair) (Ardverikie) (RF)  
Calum Hogg (Secretary) (Bidwells) (CH)  
Finlay Clark (Bidwells) (FC)  
Tim Atkinson (Ben Alder) (TA)  
Dimitri Harrison (Jahama) (DH)  
Lorraine Servant (SNH) (LS)  
Phil Lloyd (Ardverikie) (PL)  
Lord Pearson (Cruach) (MP)  
Clifton Wrottesley (Ben Alder) (CW)  
Alison Austin (John Muir Trust) (AA)  
Sinclair Coghill (SNH) (SC)  
Allan Mcleod (Corrou) (AM)  
Donald Rowantree (Corrou) (DR)  
Ross Dakers (Ben Alder) (RD)  
Richard Cooke (ADMG) (RC)

No objections to video recording of the meeting.

### 2.0 Minutes of AGM – 21 October 2019

No matters arising from the previous minutes raised.

### 3.0 Matters Arising

MP queried whether Black Corries Estate had been invited.  
FC will feed actions from meeting with Black Corries, who are happy sitting within Black Mount DMG.

## 4.0 Chairman's Report

A brief look back at 2020:

A prolonged cold and wet winter/spring 2019-20 made for difficult conditions earlier in the year, and perhaps the worst weather conditions for deer we have seen for some time.

Then followed Covid-19, and 2020 became the most extraordinary year.

My visit to Corroun and meeting with Lisbet Rausing had to be cancelled, and most importantly for our group, the planned helicopter count had to be abandoned at the very last minute. This left us without any accurate basis to make meaningful decisions for the coming seasons, and our population models are out of balance as a result.

Mother Nature enjoyed the peace and quiet of the lockdown, with the absence of road traffic and hill walkers. However as soon as the lockdown ended, that situation was reversed very quickly, and by a substantial margin to levels that most of us had seldom seen before.

Preparations for the stag season revolved around establishing Covid-19 protocols so that staff and guests could operate in safety, and I would like to acknowledge the huge efforts made by everyone in this respect.

However, measures such as hiring in additional vehicles came at a cost, and the venison market had slumped which only added to the difficulties and the financial burden. Stalking lettings were already suffering from cancellations, especially by overseas visitors, and then later in the season new Covid-19 restrictions on numbers and people occupying households resulted in an overnight cessation of almost every let stalking week remaining. The estimated financial cost of this has been calculated and reported by ADMG.

Obviously Covid-19 also meant that meetings and any stakeholder engagement events did not happen.

We will hear reports from individual members during the AGM.

Looking forward:-

All group members are now seeing the cumulative effect of the culling at Corroun, some members have been affected to a much greater extent than others. As perhaps to be expected this has been worse for Dunan, Camusericht and Cruach, but certainly both deer numbers and movements within our DMG are now markedly different.

Whilst this was to be expected, and we knew it was coming, it does not make it any easier for those involved when such changes are forced upon them and are out of their control. It is of great concern and a constant worry to owners, managers, and staff, and please rest assured that I do not underestimate the extent of the current feeling on this subject. The fact is that one of our group, quite legitimately, is following a very different policy to the rest of us. All that we can ask is that we gain as much co-operation and goodwill as is possible as we manage our way forward.

## 5.0 DMP Review

Secretary thanks all members for continuing to send in recruitment & mortality counts throughout the year.

Effects of Covid-19 on the DMG have been felt, and many estates will have experienced significant changes in business and the way they work.

Population modelling are starting to look skewed due to significant changes in the populations throughout the group. As a result, until a helicopter count can be carried out, the individual estate models are no longer a good representation of populations, as the model cannot accurately depict movement of deer from one area to another due to factors such as a vacuum effect. This translates into some areas showing negative deer populations.

We hope to carry out the deer helicopter count in spring, which will inform a new model.

Aspirational deer densities within the group will have to be set again once the count has been completed. A lot has changed since the DMP was created, and a full review meeting will be required after the helicopter count results have been received.

MP - has requested if the smaller estates can carry out foot counting to reduce costs.

AA – JMT have been carrying out interim foot counts, and would be happy to carry out foot count in the spring.

**SC** – Would prefer to have each estate counted by helicopter, and proposes a different method for charging helicopter count, by running a clock on each area, and allocating costs based on time spent in each estate.

MP – Breadalbane are considering drones for carrying out drones.

CH – MWDMG may have issues due to the scale of the estates, and the distances away from operators that the drones can fly. Very happy to consider use of drones instead of helicopters.

SC – NatureScot have a bid out currently to look at drone operation covering larger areas. This is still early days, and will hopefully provide large scale deer counting in the future.

**ACTION** DH to ask the question of whether the drone operators at the smelter can look at deer counting.

**ACTION** CH has requested that if members have carried out foot counts, please send these through.

**ACTION** MP and AA to send through details of drone operator being trialled at Breadalbane.

## 6.0 Deer Management Group

### 6.1 Membership area & members

Rik Eppins has been invited to join group meetings.  
Black Corries have been invited to join, and FC will continue to pass on action points to Black Corries.

JMT have queried the allocation of costs between members, and CH has looked into the basis for the current split. This appears to be historical currently.

CH has carried out an exercise on recalculating on the following basis;

- Percentage based on land area
- Percentage based on 5 year average stag cull
- Percentage based on 5 year average total cull
- Combination of land area & 5 year average stag cull
- Combination of land area & 5 year average total cull

CH to circulate costs model with group for discussion.

DR – would prefer the least changeable variable is land area, so feels the fairest is the percentage based upon the land mass of the group.

AA – Agrees with DR on land being the basis, as cull policies do change.

TA –Raises on behalf of Ben Alder that membership dues should be based on earning potential.

AA – points out that not all members have earning potential from deer management as a management objective will make this basis.

FC – a balance between all viewpoints may be to look at the combination of land mass and deer culls.

**ACTION** for group – CH to circulate fee breakdown exercise. Group to review various proposals and come to a decision on fee breakdown

## 6.2 Election of office bearers

Election of secretary:

FC – it has been a privilege for Bidwells to act as secretary to the group over the past 20 years. The group has navigated itself through difficult times, and is regarded by ADMG to be one of the groups who works well.

FC is conscious that the group is facing a challenging time period. FC is conscious the function of the secretary is to deliver the objectives of the group, and believes that collaboration is crucial to successfully managing the deer population.

FC proposes that the group take the secretary role away and discuss amongst themselves, without FC & CH present.

RF –RF formally proposes Bidwells are reappointed.

Since meeting RF has received a number of supporting statements, and no objections to Bidwells continuing as secretary.

Bidwells to continue as Secretary.

Election of Chairman:

FC proposes Roddie Feilden (RF) continue as chairman.

DR seconds proposal.

Roddie Feilden re-elected as chairman.

## 6.3 Date of next meeting

Date 22 October 2021

Location provisionally: Strathmashie Hut (Covid-19 allowing)

## 7.0 Communication

### 7.1 SNH report

Sinclair update report

SNH report on Deer Management went to Scottish Government at the end of last year.

Feedback on the report had been expected in June, but Covid-19 has thrown all government business along the road for the time being. We expect to hear the Gov view and review of the report.

Sinclair is not sure what the outcome will be, but expects the Scottish Government has broad support for most of the proposals.

Initiatives which can be picked up with some consultation, some elements will require changes in legislation so may take more time to implement.

NatureScot perspective has the current drive towards a green recovery, and reverse biodiversity loss.

Strong interest and push toward peatland action to reduce the negative impacts of climate change. Woodland expansion is also strongly supported by NatureScot to help fight against climate change. SC sees good sustainable deer management as playing an important role.

SC expects that in 2-3 weeks we should expect some feedback on DWG report.

## 7.2 ADMG report

Richard Cooke thanks the group for welcoming him to the meeting.

ADMG has been busy throughout the year on behalf of its members:

- Parliamentary reception in December 2019 with a good turn out from MSP's. Hosted by Mairi Gougeon.
- SNH report was cautiously favourable of the
- 18<sup>th</sup> march AGM was cancelled due to Covid-19, and this was reinstated via Zoom Call on the 8<sup>th</sup> of July.
- Normally ADMG has a good presence at the Scone and Moy Game Fairs, but neither ran this year.
- Newsletter was issued in March.
- Many e-scopes have been issued this year, giving advice on Covid-19 and the effect on the Deer Management industry. Particular concerns for ADMG were the effect of lockdown on the stalking season and on the ability to sell venison.
- ADMG carried out a survey of as many members as possible. They estimated the loss to the venison industry is estimated to be £9 million excluding value of venison income.
- Regulations at the end of September prompted a secondary survey, which had 34 responses. From that response, the loss of income would be 1.1 million in lost stag income.
- Thankfully all stag venison was sold, but at a significantly lower rate (40% of previous years).
- Processors are under considerable pressure and are holding significant stock from the previous season. Coupled with Covid-19 measures there is a significantly increased running costs.
- Domestic restaurant trade has all but halted.
- Retail sector is up 9%.
- Current going rate for venison is approximately £1/kg. RC encourages members to pressure dealers for increased returns due to increase in retail sector uptake.
- Accommodation has been extremely challenging, and many estates have experienced cancellations due to restrictions imposed upon accommodation.
- ADMG wrote to Scottish Government on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October explaining the impact of Covid-19 upon the deer sector, representing the losses felt by the deer industry and the potential loss of employment.
- The current pandemic has prompted some members to sell venison directly locally.
- ADMG awaiting response from Scottish Government on DWG report & response to NatureScot report on DMG's.
- RC comments that the Scottish Governments agenda is driven by Climate Change, and notes the DMG's are in a strong position to take a positive role in deliver climate change goals of carbon sequestration, habitat improvement and tree planting.
- RC notes that there is a possibility of a further deer act in the next parliamentary sitting, and that there is a lot to play for in this. ADMG hopes to continue to represent DMG's in this setting.
- RC notes that a more holistic approach is being discussed in many DMG's with Land Management Plans being discussed to replace Deer Management Plans.

RF thanks Richard for his comments.

MP thanks Richard & the ADMG on behalf of the deer group for all they do. RF seconds Malcolm.

## 7.3 Other stakeholder engagements

Due to Covid-19 no engagement events have taken place.

## **8.0 Natural Environment**

CH thanks all members for the ongoing commitment to Habitat Monitoring, and thanks TA for providing the copy of the recent monitoring carried out on the Ben Alder SAC.

LS has raised that there will be monitoring carried out on the Ben Nevis SAC in early spring on woodland monitoring on the Scots Pine. In later summer upland monitoring will be carried out. Further monitoring is due on the Ben Alder SAC.

RF suggests a meeting once NatureScot monitoring has been completed, and this can be combined with Heli Count. LS confirms the value of this once counts and monitoring has been completed.

Ben Nevis SAC steering group meetings will carry on regularly.

SC thanks the group for taking forward monitoring, and hopes the group can use the information gleaned to inform management decision going forward.

### **8.1 Carbon sensitive habitats**

JMT have met with Julia Stoddart, and confirmed that the areas have all been surveyed, and they hope to collaborate and submit a joint application.

MP notes that Cruach did look at a peat restoration scheme 5 years ago, but the scheme did not go ahead at that time. MP hopes to re-examine a new scheme within walking distance of Rannoch Station.

Corrou has completed 54 hectares site and about to start on 170 hectares in Strath Ossian. Corrou extend an open invitation to go to Corrou to view the projects and see the progress the projects are making.

AM to circulate photos of successful sites.

CH notes more funding has been allocated in the most recent budget, so encourages all members to consider applications.

DR notes that projects are single year funding, so application, and work needs to be completed within a year.

RC notes that ADMG have raised this issue with the program. Lack of contractors is an ongoing issue, and currently funding does not allow contractors to carry out work themselves.

DR notes that they are looking into the Peatland Carbon Code to raise finance on peatland restoration.

PL has offered to share information with group members on why projects they have proposed have not been successful.

DH raised the point that members need to consider not just carbon, but all other aspects of natural capital. Caution on entering into unregulated schemes, as the market is still very new and unregulated.

SC notes the Scottish Government are looking at larger multi year projects for larger collaborative projects looking at landscape scale.

RF & DR endorse invitation for group members to visit Corrou schemes.

## **9.0 Woodland Environment**

Nothing to raise at this time.

## 10.0 Deer Population & Management

### 10.1 2019/20 final cull numbers

	Culls 2019/20		
	Stags	hinds	calves
Ardverikie	109	83	19
Ben Alder & Dalwhinnie	23	100	30
Ben Nevis (JMT)	13	22	3
Camusericht	22	32	12
Corrour Fersit			20
Corrour old Corrour	410	278	115
Cruach	20	24	8
Dunan	27	40	10
FES	40	2	0
Glen Nevis	3	4	0
Killiechonate	55	120	40
Mamore	39	200	50
	<b>758</b>	<b>903</b>	<b>309</b>

### 10.2 2020 Stag culls & proposed out of season culls

Ardverikie – 100 stags (average weight 86.4kg)

Ben Alder – 4 stags wont be shooting out of season. Struggled to find stags. Prior to rut low numbers. Counts found 27 mature stags on all of Ben Alder.

Ben Nevis – 3 stags in season. Aim for 12 more in out of season

Camusericht – 13 – same problem as ben alder

Corrour – 327 stags, planning to shoot out of season (average weight 13.8 stone, heaviest 18 stone)

Cruach – 15 stags, hoping to increase to 20 in future seasons

Dunan – 10 stags (heaviest 17st, average 13 ½ stone, note serious lack of stags)

FES - TBC

Killiechonate - 31 with no out of season planned.

Mamore – 29 with no out of season planned.

Ben Alder have raised concerns regarding elevated culling levels on Corrour, and the impact that this is having on Ben Alder stalking business viability.

RD notes that Ben Alder habitat assessment does indicate the affect that Corrour culling is having on the western half of the estate, with a lack of dung present and low browsing on monitoring plots.

TA would like to note that the severe reduction of mature stags came on the back of a severe winter mortality.

SC asked how hind numbers across the estates are. RD notes that Ben Alder still have high levels of hinds on the estate, only lacking mature stags. SC suggest Ben Alder may consider reducing hind numbers to give more space on Ben Alder for stags.

DR raised that Corrour do not want to be culling stags heavily and would prefer if transient stags did not move onto Corrour. If common ground solution to prevent movement onto Corrour this would be preferable.

MP notes that Cruach is planning to increase the tree shelter and increase numbers within the trees to prevent movement onto Corrour.

MP expressed a desire to meet with Corrour to work together.

### 10.3 Proposed 2020/21 hind culls

Ben Alder – 100 hinds  
Ardverikie – 100-110  
Ben Nevis – 30, increased from 20 in response to monitoring  
Camusericht – 40  
Corroul – as many as possible – 250 or more  
Cruach – 20 plus calves  
Dunan – tbc  
Killiechonate – 100  
Mamore – 180

**ACTION** – MP has requested that a discussion be had between neighbouring estates regarding hind culls.

### 10.4 Population model & counts

CH had a discussion with SC regarding helicopter counts in the spring.  
The population model is not an accurate depiction of the current state of play on the ground, and a new count will inform updated models.  
AA raised that JMT are not willing to contribute to heli count on a cost/benefit basis with the current allocation of cost. If reassessed based on time spent, JMT will review at that time.

Count proposed to be split among members based on time helicopter spends on each land holding. A timer to be run on each boundary.

**ACTION** - CH & SC to liaise to arrange quotes for helicopter counts to be circulated among the group.

**ACTION** – RF proposes that a foot count is carried out if a helicopter count is not possible.

### 10.5 Deer welfare, biosecurity and best practise

TA – increasing concerns on impact on deer welfare regarding out of season shooting of hinds. Change to season was proposed within DWG including the removal of closed season for stags altogether.  
SC expects that proposed changes will be out for consultation before any change is implemented.  
MP notes that the benefit to estates as hinds can be let earlier in the season.  
RC notes that under the law at present, it is possible to shoot out of season already. If a general expansion of the season is to happen, there needs to have a full consultation which ADMG will engage with.

### 10.6 Venison market / economic benefits & costs

Nothing additional raised.



## 11.0 Wellbeing of people

11.1 DVC  
Nothing noted.

11.2 Public Access  
Access under Covid19 restrictions have affected access levels across the estates.

11.3 Wellbeing of staff  
TA notes that the current pandemic is having a serious impact upon staff members, and worries over job security are serious concerns.

## 12.0 AOCB

MP thanks the chairman.

DH suggest starting a smaller subgroup to address to impact Corrour Culling has upon their neighbours.

DH proposes exploration of looking more at Land Management rather than simply Deer Management. DH propsoes this be considered more actively.

**ACTION** – RF & DH to follow up on Corrour subgroup proposal.

## ACTIONS

**ACTION** – DH to ask the question of whether the drone operators at the smelter can look at deer counting.

**ACTION** – CH has requested that if members have carried out foot counts, please send these through.

**ACTION** – MP and AA to send through details of drone operator being trialled at Breadalbane.

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