

Minute of Cairngorm Deer Advisory Group Meeting

Date: 4 June 2008

Time: 10.30am

Venue: Cairngorms National Park Authority office, Grantown-on-Spey

Present: Phil Ratcliffe (Chair), Alastair Colquhoun (AofCC), Dick Balharry, Bruce Anderson (both SE Link), Richard Cooke (EGDMG), Jamie Williamson (MDMG), Paul Timms (SNH), Willie Lamont (FCS), Iain Hope (DCS), John Bruce (BDS), Hamish Trench and Colin McClean (both CNPA)

1. Welcome and apologies.

Apologies were received from Richard Wallace, Simon Blackett, Chris Hewitt, and Patrick Thompson.

2. Matters arising.

Matters arising from the meeting on 22 January were dealt with in Paper CDAG1 04062008. Discussion focussed on developing the links between CDAG and DMGs. It was agreed that CDAG would develop communications with DMGs. Communications would include a brief paper stating how CDAG developed from the Cairngorm Joint Committee of DMGs, and then explain its function and work programme. DMG reps could use this paper when attending DMG meetings.

Action 1: Write paper for DMG reps. **Action: Colin McClean.**

Following on from the CDAG meeting on 22nd January, CNPA and Wild Scotland held a seminar on 29th April to present opportunities for using deer as a wildlife tourism resource. About 20 estates attended with 4 subsequently submitting outline proposals. CNPA and Wild Scotland will help these estates seek public funding if they wish.

CDAG were informed that Colin McClean had accepted a permanent contract with CNPA to develop CDAG projects and other issues.

3. Developing a Cairngorms National Park deer management framework.

Paper CDAG2 04062008 was presented. This paper identified that the main conflicts surrounding deer management arose from 1) differing views on appropriate objectives and 2) a lack of inclusion. The paper suggested a 4 stage process to tackle these sources of conflict based on 1) mapping desired deer densities, 2) discussing the implications of those densities with a wide range of interests, 3) mitigating issues which

arose from the discussion where that was possible and 4) explaining decisions where mitigation was not possible.

Some members felt conflict was an inappropriate word to use as deer management was more about negotiated compromise between competing objectives and seeking levels of agreement between interests. Members agreed the 4 stage process would provide a platform to seek levels of agreement and would identify the local issues that interests wish to resolve. The 4 stage process would also identify areas where there was no conflict and therefore could be useful in tackling perceptions that there were fundamental problems in deer management. Some members felt the 4 stage process should help establish a more positive mindset about deer management. There was some discussion about how we measure the success or failure of such an approach. Not all agreed that reduced conflict would be a measure of increasingly sustainable deer management.

There was discussion about what should be mapped. Most agreed that mapping objectives was too complicated as many estates were multi objective. Mapping desired deer densities would be useful as decisions about desired deer densities incorporated environmental and socio economic considerations. Desired deer densities should not be seen as a proxy for deer impacts. It was important maps were not seen as static, as objectives and desired deer densities would change, perhaps over quite short time periods.

It was agreed that the 4 stage process should be linked to other work, particularly work on habitat condition. There was some desire to incorporate a vision for the Cairngorms National Park which should seek to enhance habitat condition. Currently very few land managers have formal habitat objectives or carry out formal habitat monitoring. The 4 stage process would be more valuable if it incorporated proposals to assess habitat condition across the Park.

Action 2: Produce project plan which would incorporate habitat monitoring within the 4 stage process and make links to other CNPA strategies and frameworks. Then implement the process defined in the new project plan. **Action: Colin McClean.**

4. Joint Working update.

Paper CDAG3 22012008 was presented. This paper was in the form of a spreadsheet showing information on Natura sites which were making a contribution towards government targets for 2010. Sites with features which were in favourable or recovering condition were not included on the spreadsheet. CDAG were content with the spreadsheet format and the information provided and requested that this spreadsheet be used in the future.

5. Deer management at Mar Lodge. Presentation by Chris Hewitt, NTS

Chris sent his apologies as he had to attend a funeral. This item will be re-arranged for a future meeting.

Action 3: Chris Hewitt, Mar Lodge Property Manager, to be invited to present details on Mar Lodge deer management at the next CDAG meeting. **Action: Colin McClean.**

6. DCS/ SNH merger update.

The merger will go ahead with a likely completion date of April 2010. Both DCS and SNH are determined the merger must produce a satisfactory outcome for all deer interests. Both organisations are considering which structures will best achieve a satisfactory outcome. Current SNH thinking was that DCS should not be absorbed as an internal SNH deer unit, but should also not be so integrated that DCS staff skills were completely diluted. Managers from both organisations are working to develop a model which would work well. The merger will require enabling legislation and this may create an opportunity for a more fundamental review of deer legislation. Current DCS work programmes will be largely unaffected by the merger.

Some members saw the merger as both an opportunity and a threat. The broad based experience of the DCS Board was seen as difficult to replace, although it is likely that the SNH Board may recruit deer expertise. The willingness of DCS to use outside expertise, eg in the development of Best Practice was seen as a model that SNH could use in the future. The gathering points of deer interests like the Deer Management Round Table, Best Practice Demonstrations and CDAG (at local level) should be maintained. Andrew Thin will present his thoughts on merger at the DCS Northern Seminar at the Drumossie Hotel on 13 June 2008.

Action 4: CDAG to consider developing a view on the merger so it can seek to influence future structures. **Action: Phil Ratcliffe.**

Action 5: Circulate link to Scottish Government report on the merger consultation. **Action Colin McClean.**

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/Countryside/Simplifyin%20gtheLandscape/Reports> Discharged in these minutes.

7. Sika deer issues in the CNP.

Paper CDAG4 04062008 was presented. Sika are present as a breeding species in the Monadhliaths section of the Cairngorms National Park. They have not been known to breed east of the Spey. Easterly spread seems to be slowed by a combination of deer fencing, road and river barriers and active culling of colonising sika. Some members felt it was largely down to luck that sika had not yet colonised the core

Cairngorms and that it was inevitable they would do so. The draft Joint Agency Strategy for Wild Deer has an objective to "Minimise further spread of sika through active local management". It was agreed CDAG policy on sika should be lead by national policy.

CDAG agreed better information on sika distribution and numbers would be useful, but did not feel landowners should be asked for information in addition to that required from annual cull returns. CDAG did not think DMGs should be asked to formalise policy on sika at least until the Joint Agency Strategy for Wild Deer was finalised. CDAG agreed it would be useful to determine the level of sika introgression within the Cairngorms red deer population. CDAG was ambivalent about giving credit to deer managers for preventing sika colonisation east of the Spey. It was agreed CDAG should not be seen to dictate policy to the Monadhliaths DMG.

Action 6: Identify the cost of sampling sufficient numbers of red deer within the Cairngorms so as to determine levels of sika introgression.
Action: Colin McClean.

8. Any other business

Action 7: A discussion of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park leaflet entitled "Deer in the National Park." to be held at the next meeting. **Action: Colin McClean.**

9. Date of next meeting.

1030am, 25 November 2008 in the **Mar Lodge Ballroom.**

Colin McClean
7th June 2008