

Minute of Cairngorms Deer Advisory Group Meeting

Date: 5 September 2006

Time: 2pm

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

Present: Phil Ratcliffe (Chair), Michael Hone, Ewan Cameron, Alastair Colquhoun, David Kinnear, Donald Fraser, David Bale, Richard Cooke, Patrick Thompson, John MacKenzie, James Adamson, Bruce Anderson, John Bruce, Colin McClean

1. Apologies

Received from David Greer, Simon Blackett, George Macdonald, Drennan Watson, Richard Wallace, Jamie Williamson, Will Boyd Wallis

2. Minutes of last meeting

The Minutes of the meeting on 3 July 2006 were approved. It was noted that the event proposed by SNH to share good practice, which was mentioned in the CDAG Minutes as scheduled for 8/9 September, had been postponed.

3. Matters arising

a) Deer data

The Cairngorm Joint Committee of DMGs are attempting to obtain data on culls, counts and deer related employment from DMGs within the CNP. Some estates are dissected by the Park boundary and it was agreed that local deer managers should decide what information was relevant to the CNP. It was accepted that the deer population within the CNP was far from static and there were regular movements across boundaries.

Action 1: Collate data from CJCDMG for 20 February 2007. **Michael Hone (helped by Colin McClean if required).**

b) Training

A proposed deer management training course by BDS has been planned in the Park. No decision on content, intended audience or date has yet been made.

Action 2: Clarify course content, target audience and timing. **Colin McClean/ John Bruce.**

Action 3: Obtain data on numbers of people trained in deer management related topics on courses funded by CNPA. **Colin McClean.**

4. Remit and membership of CDAG

It was agreed that the paper entitled “Cairngorms Deer Advisory Group: proposed remit March 2006” continued to provide a valid framework for CDAG remit and membership. CDAG will review this subject periodically. The current remit for the group, which was centred on increasing trust between sectors and improving communication, was working well and there was little need for change. There was acceptance that people will, in practice, represent their agencies or organisations and it was unrealistic to expect people not to do so. No new permanent members will be invited to join CDAG but representatives from specific interest groups will be co-opted on to CDAG as and when required.

5. Sustainable deer management

- a) Resolving conflict between deer management and natural heritage issues.

Colin McClean has started a 2 year post to help deliver sustainable deer management within the CNP. He presented his thoughts on the subject to CDAG to prompt discussion. These are summarised below:

Sustainable deer management means different things to different people. Within the CNP sustainable deer management needs to be defined in terms of the size of deer populations and the processes which manage them. Government definitions of sustainability and the 4 aims of Scottish National Parks include elements of environmental protection and economic activity. The draft Park Plan reflects these elements through strategic objectives which aim to manage deer populations at densities consistent with natural heritage qualities while maintaining and enhancing the socio-economic sustainability of the deer resource. The deer related responses to the draft Park plan are polarised between those supporting the natural heritage benefits of deer reductions and those supporting the socio-economic benefits of commercial stalking. Government definitions, the aims of the National Park and the desires of different sectors all support the concept that natural heritage enhancement and commercial stalking should both continue in the Park.

The responses to the draft Park plan highlight the fundamental conflict between commercial stalking and management to enhance the natural heritage. This is basically a conflict of deer densities. A key part of the delivery of sustainable deer management should focus on resolving this conflict. Simplistically, sustainable deer management can be defined as all relevant interests reaching agreement on deer densities.

Different objectives require different densities of deer. **The key task for CNPA is to help develop a deer management planning process where target deer densities can be discussed and agreed across the Park so as to create a patchwork of deer densities which allow different objectives to be achieved in different parts of the Park.** The existing deer management planning process

working at its best provides a model which can be built upon eg. the draft deer management plan produced by Cairngorm Speyside DMG but there needs to be wider public consultation.

Currently we have a patchwork of deer densities but the existing patchwork does not fit comfortably with the public interest. This patchwork will change, driven by public and private objectives. The key public objective will be Joint Working, a process devised by government to prevent damage to Natura designated sites. High priority Natura sites will be monitored to define deer impacts and establish ecological baselines against which trends in impacts can be determined. Agencies can prevent damage using the powers within the Deer Act or use incentives to encourage management to enhance natural heritage features.

Natura designations cover 25% of the CNP. Not all will necessarily require deer reductions but Joint Working is likely to reduce deer numbers throughout much of the Cairngorms.

Private objectives will have a relatively weak role in determining future deer densities on Natura sites but will have a much stronger role in determining deer densities on non- designated sites. Current private objectives require a wide range of deer densities. A deer management planning process must fairly balance private and public interests throughout the CNP and seek to resolve conflicts through discussion and mitigation.

Discussion points following presentation

- DMG representatives on CDAG were unaware of any estates which wished to increase deer densities beyond 10-15 deer per km².
- Planning must taken account of other species of grazing animals.
- VisitScotland survey suggests many people want to see deer and there should be places within the Park where deer can be reliably viewed by the public.
- Fencing can separate objectives but is expensive and requires mitigation against various negative impacts.
- CNPA website does not include deer management or reference to CDAG and there needs to be better communication about deer.
- The CSDMG draft deer management plan cannot be publicised through the CNPA website. This was thought to be unhelpful.
- Deer management is currently viewed as being sustainable by many people and there is a sound foundation to build on.
- The general public hold a very diverse range of opinion about deer and their views are not as polarised as those within responses to the draft Park plan..
- One key benefit of deer management plans supported by a wide range of stakeholders is that deer managers will be much more able to reject criticism.

b) Update on current and future Joint Working on Natura sites within the Park.

A number of Natura sites within the Park are already the subject of Joint Working. These include Glenfeshie and Caenlochan where deer reductions are ongoing through Section 7 Agreements, and Kinveachy, Upper Deeside, Drumochter Hills and the Monadhliaths, where monitoring protocols are either being developed or being implemented. Further site specific information is available at www.scotland.gov.uk/topics/Rural/JointAction/Combinedlist .

There was some discussion about individual sites but the meeting agreed that CDAG should take a strategic approach to Joint Working and not seek to duplicate the work of DMGs. Some people felt that aspects of Joint Working were unjust. For example an estate could be deprived of its deer related income because of the public interest for several decades without recompense. Also publicly funded deer reductions on one estate could have financial impacts on surrounding estates which would pay an unrecompensed private cost for public goods. It was argued that the socio- economic consequences of deer reductions on and around Natura sites needed to be carefully considered by agencies and that public money may need to be spread more widely to ensure fair compensation. The issue of compensating for loss of capital value was also raised.

Action 4: A strategic level update on Joint Working within the CNP will be a standing item on future CDAG agendas. **Colin McClean/ DCS.**

Action 5: A map of Natura designated sites within the CNP to be sent to all CDAG members. **Colin McClean.**

6. Cairngorms/ Speyside DMG draft Deer Management Plan

A draft DMP has been prepared for the CSDMG by Phil Ratcliffe. Phil commented on the high level of agreement between CSDMG members despite their very wide ranging land management objectives. The production of the plan was privately funded despite an offer of 100% funding by SNH. In hindsight some CSDMG members felt the rejection of the SNH offer had been mistaken.

The CSDMG wished the plan to be a public document and wished advice from CDAG on how an effective consultation should be conducted.

Action 6: Copies of the draft DMP to be sent to all CDAG members for wider dissemination as members felt fit. **Phil Ratcliffe.**

Action 7: Ensure all CDAG members have correct contact details. **Phil Ratcliffe.**

7. Marketing of sport and venison

Various current marketing initiatives were described. These included a website showing available stalking opportunities, the development of more flexible stalking packages to fit modern leisure time trends, the promotion of the Scottish Quality Venison Assurance Scheme, the development of local informal producer groups which received market premiums and the potential use of a Cairngorms brand. The meeting was impressed with the amount of marketing activity for sport and venison taking place. Problems associated with obtaining organic status and the difficulties of achieving hygiene standards reached by abattoir killed meat were discussed.

The change in venison markets was noted. 10 years ago most venison was exported while now 80 per cent went into the home market. Although this was generally seen as a good thing venison prices had not increased. Farmed venison remains at least four times more valuable than wild venison and wild venison prices are likely to be kept low due to competition with New Zealand producers.

8. Any other business

Action 8: Draft Minutes will be circulated for comment prior to discussion/ approval at the subsequent CDAG meeting. **Colin McClean.**

Action 9: The development of a "deer section" within the CNPA website to be explored as part of a wider Communications Strategy for deer in the CNP. **Colin McClean.**

Action 10: The workings of the LLTNP Deer Forum to be the subject of a presentation at the next CDAG meeting. **Phil Ratcliffe.**

Action 11: CDAG members to receive a link to the Joint Working website. **Colin McClean. Discharged in these draft Minutes.**

Action 12: CDAG members to consider and respond to the following questions:

1. Should CDAG have its own website?
2. Should the minutes of CDAG meetings be made public? **Action all.**

9. Date of next meeting

Date: Tuesday 20 Feb 2007

Time: 2pm

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

Colin McClean 6 September 2006