

CAIRNGORMS DEER ADVISORY GROUP

DRAFT Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 5th November 2009 at The Lecht

Present

Dick	Balharry	Access and Recreation
Ewan	Cameron	Association of Cairngorms Community Councils
Alasdair	Colquhoun	Association of Cairngorms Community Councils
Colin	Sheddon	British Association of Shooting and Conservation
John	Bruce	British Deer Society
Will	Boyd-Wallis	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Michael	Hone	Cairngorms Speyside Deer Management Group
Iain	Hope	Deer Commission for Scotland
Patrick	Thompson	Midwest Association of Deer Management Group
David	Kinnear	Monadhliath Deer Management Group
Paul	Timms	Scottish Natural Heritage

1. Welcome and apologies.

The new Chairman, Michael Hone, welcomed everyone. Apologies were received from:

Richard	Cooke	Association of Deer Management Groups
Hamish	Trench	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Susan	Walker	CNPA/DCS Boards
Simon	Blackett	East Grampian Deer Management Group
Richard	Wallace	Forestry Commission Scotland
Willie	Lamont	Forestry Commission Scotland
Jamie	Williamson	Monadhliath Deer Management Group

2. Action points and Matters arising from last meeting (20 min)

All action points addressed except for update on National Park Plan Sustainable Deer Management outcomes which Will agreed to provide alongside these minutes.

WBW: Send update on progress against National Park Plan Sustainable Deer Management outcomes alongside these minutes.

Following a discussion on the election of the new Chairman it was agreed that Justin Irvine be invited to become a member of CDAG.

WBW: Invite Justin Irvine to be a member of CDAG.

Another Macaulay name (Alison Hester) was suggested as a useful contact to have in the group. Dick agreed to follow up.

DB: Contact Alison Hester to see if she would also wish to attend, in light of the fact that Justin Irvine is also likely to join the group.

3. Sika hybridisation (50 min)

WBW gave a brief presentation on the recent study of hybridisation between sika deer and red deer in the Cairngorm Speyside area of the CNP commissioned by the CNPA. In a sample of 108 red deer collected from Abernethy, Inshriach, Ralia and Rothiemurchus Estates, no significant genetic evidence of hybridisation with Japanese sika deer was found.

The report prepared by the Institute of Evolutionary Biology contained recommendations about early detection and elimination of sika deer from the National Park. This stimulated some discussion.

The fact that there is very little evidence of hybridisation in the area of the study was welcomed; this research is a useful baseline for future research. It was noted that there are considerably higher numbers of sika deer occupying land to the west of the River Spey. The few sika deer seen east of the Spey are thought to be most commonly roving males.

Concern was expressed about sika potentially being demonised by some people. It was pointed out that sika deer are covered by the same welfare laws and same out of season licensing conditions as native deer. The genetic purity of red deer was questioned; it is unknown to what extent red deer contain the genes from e.g. introduced wapiti.

A number of island 'refugia', away from the threat of non-native deer, are being considered by DCS and others. With sika deer present in reasonable numbers west of the River Spey, the possibility of the CNP being a complete refuge was considered doubtful, but the evidence from this study does give significant encouragement and highlights the need to remain vigilant about the possibility of increased incursions of sika deer into the Park.

CDAG agreed that it is not the group's role to dictate *how* individual deer managers tackle incursions of sika on their land but it would be favourable to have a park-wide objective. CDAG endorse the objective set out in Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach (WDNA) which states that the further spread of non-native deer species should be minimised.

It was agreed that it would be useful to have more information on counts and culls of sika deer within the National Park. Iain Hope agreed to assimilate information

held by DCS but indicated for privacy reasons he could not provide information on an estate by estate basis.

IH Provide DCS records of sika deer counts and culls in the CNP from the last 5 years.

4. Deer Framework (65 min)

WBW introduced the Deer Framework paper for discussion. He emphasised that this was the 'first stab' at setting out how the framework might look and he is very open to constructive comments and suggestions.

The intention was for CDAG to discuss, firstly the Contents, secondly the draft vision and thirdly the draft set of principles. Time constraints meant that only the first two items were fully discussed, but some useful general points were also made about the principles section by CDAG members both during and prior to the meeting. Key points are summarised as follows:

Contents

It was agreed that the contents would cover the broad range of environmental, social and economic issues expected.

DK was supportive of Alvie and Dalraddy Estate being one of the case studies.

It was commented that the contents didn't indicate sufficient reference to the importance of the natural heritage. There are to be sections on the economic and cultural value of deer but no specific section on the environmental significance. WBW assured the members that the natural heritage being the foundation upon which deer [and indeed we all] survive is at the heart of the document and will be apparent throughout, but a section on the environmental influence of deer could be added for both clarity and parity.

Vision

The draft vision was written in the present tense as if speaking in the present 25 years from today. This was thought to be misleading, it would be better to write it in the future tense.

As with the contents section there was concern expressed that habitat/natural heritage considerations were not given sufficient prominence. The author admitted that in his own mind this is so fundamental to responsible deer management that it was inadvertently understated.

There was a lot of discussion about whether or not the 25 year vision was sufficiently visionary or in fact implied any change to current practice. The vision does not necessarily have to lead to change in management, but there was a consensus that for the vision to have value it needed to provide some suggestion of where change is needed even if this is moderate.

The group discussion suggested that the wording of the draft vision does not adequately reflect the need to ensure the long term future for healthy and robust populations of native deer living in flourishing undamaged habitats. All agreed the need for *long term* deer management planning and that the vision should reflect this. Some useful suggestions for wording were gathered. WBW will endeavour to embrace them all fairly in the next draft.

Principles of responsible deer management

There was support for the use of the word ‘responsible’ in relation to deer management rather than ‘sustainable’. However it was agreed that a more appropriate title for this section would be “Sustaining the deer resource in the Cairngorms National Park”.

Although the concept of a diversity of densities of deer across the National Park is embraced by CDAG, concern was expressed about the use of the word ‘patchwork’ and an alternative is to be sought.

Other general points

The Deer Framework paper has been sent out not only to CDAG, but Deer Management Groups connected to the National Park. WBW reiterated the call for further comments outwith the meeting, requesting that they reach him by the end of November so that they can be fully considered and incorporated as appropriate.

All Send comments on the deer framework to WBW by end of November

The strength of CDAG is the diversity of organisations/interests involved. If CDAG can agree a framework that sufficiently supports the continued responsible management of deer and supports the many benefits associated with deer, then we will have a strong basis upon which to build collective understanding throughout the National Park.

The importance of ensuring individual deer managers and deer management groups continue to support this developing process was strongly backed by CDAG. Without the involvement of land/deer managers this framework will be worthless.

It was suggested that a small working group would assist the further preparation of the framework. DB and MH agreed to work with WBW in that capacity.

WBW Prepare a revised draft for consideration by working group.

5. Joint Working update

(5 min)

It was reported that habitat management plans are being prepared for the Beinn a’ Ghlo and Drummochter Hills SACs. It is anticipated that the habitat management plans will satisfy agency natural heritage requirements while at the same time taking account of private estate objectives. The plans should help to identify appropriate management measures eligible for public funding under SRDP.

6. Future role of CDAG

(5 min)

There was not sufficient time for full discussion, but the chair emphasised the importance of CDAG in guiding the deer framework and the next National Park plan and that its strength lies in the diversity of people in the group. The importance of ensuring that meetings continue to be worthwhile for *all* was emphasised by others in the group.

7. AOCB

A mechanism is required for electing and allowing a chair to stand down. It was agreed that the chairmanship should be reviewed annually and stand for a maximum of three years. Michael Hone agreed to prepare an updated CDAG constitution.

MH Update the current CDAG remit document to include chair election process.

West Grampians (Speyside and Tayside) and East Grampian areas will be counted using helicopters in early 2010, the Monadhliath in early 2011. The value of a Park wide helicopter count was discussed. The difficulties of hugely varying weather and ground conditions over such a large area were highlighted. It is not known yet, but funding for counts in future years could be increasingly difficult. It was recommended that, wherever possible, foot counts be coordinated with helicopter counts.

Reference was made to correspondence between a CDAG member and DCS in connection with information contained in the Scottish Government Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill Consultation Document. CS and IH apologised on behalf of DCS, for the unacceptably long delay in the DCS response. IH agreed to speak to colleagues to establish whether or not a DCS response had been sent.

IH Speak to DCS colleagues and to report the outcome.

8. Dates of next meetings.

The following dates were agreed for 2010 (venues updated since meeting):

<u>Day</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Possible Field visit</u>
Thursday	11 th February	TBC Atholl/Pitlochry	n/a
Thursday	6 th May	Abernethy	RSPB reserve
Tuesday	10 th August	Braemar Castle	Glen Callater?
Thursday	11 th November	TBC	

NB. Since the CDAG meeting, Glen Tanar Estate has offered to host a field visit for CDAG members.

It has also become apparent that the Caenlochan Section 7 group are meeting on 10th August; we may consider reviewing this date.

CAIRNGORMS DEER ADVISORY GROUP

SUMMARY OF ACTION POINTS

Thursday 5th November 2009

WBW Will Boyd-Wallis
DB Dick Balharry
IH Iain Hope
MH Michael Hone

WBW: Send update on progress against National Park Plan Sustainable Deer Management outcomes alongside these minutes.

WBW: Invite Justin Irvine to be a member of CDAG.

DB: Contact Alison Hester to see if she would also wish to attend, in light of the fact that Justin Irvine is also likely to join the group.

IH: Provide DCS records of sika deer counts and culls in the CNP from the last 5 years.

All: Send comments on the deer framework to WBW by end of November

WBW: Prepare a revised draft for consideration by working group.

MH: Update the current CDAG remit document to include chair election process.

IH: Speak to DCS colleagues and to report the outcome of discussions to CDAG members.
