

CAIRNGORMS DEER ADVISORY GROUP

DRAFT Minutes of meeting held Thursday 6th May 2010 Forest Lodge, Abernethy.

Present

Will Boyd-Wallis (Minutes), John Bruce, Ewan Cameron, Alasdair Colquhoun, Richard Cooke, Michael Hone (Chair), Iain Hope, Justin Irvine, Gina Maffey, Pete Mayhew, Patrick Thompson, Paul Timms, Sue Walker, Jamie Williamson.

1. Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanks RSPB for their hospitality at Forest Lodge.

Apologies were received from:

Bruce Anderson, Dick Balharry, Simon Blackett, Willie Lamont, George MacDonald, Josephine Pemberton, Colin Sheddon, Hamish Trench and Richard Wallace.

2. Minutes of the last meeting – 11th February 2010

Under item 5: 'Cairngorms Deer Count report' one member reflected the views of his deer management group indicating that the notice sent out by DCS 'not to waver' planned culls in response to higher winter mortality was "acknowledged" but not expressly "welcomed" by CDAG. WBW agreed to edit the minute.

BDS (British Deer Society) were congratulated and thanked for quickly putting together and circulating their "advice to stalkers" information note.

CDAG were reminded that after being sent out for comment for a period of 4 weeks. If no serious alterations are required, the minutes then go onto the CNPA website.

WBW: Arrange for minutes of last meeting to be edited on the CNPA website and to re-circulate to CDAG.

3. Action points and Matters arising from last meeting

Sika deer

WBW had invited Josephine Pemberton to the meeting to discuss further work on assessing potential impacts of sika deer populations in the CNP, but apologised profusely to CDAG and to JP for neglecting to follow up the invitation with details of the meeting venue etc! However it was agreed that further discussions with JP could be deferred to the next meeting.

WBW: Invite Josephine Pemberton to the next meeting to discuss further potential for Sika work.

Deer Count

DCS have circulated a report of the Deer Count which covered the National Park and took place between 11th January and 23rd March 2010. It was suggested that the report, including maps be placed on the CNPA website where CDAG papers are hosted (<http://www.cairngorms.co.uk/parkauthority/meetingspapers/deer/>).

Concerns were raised about the possibility that some landowners would object to having estate boundaries and deer count numbers placed on the internet. The fact that deer count data can easily be misinterpreted, i.e. it is a snapshot in time, was also raised. These concerns were countered by the view that the deer count was paid for with public money, albeit with considerable voluntary support from the estates, and therefore the results should be publically available.

It was concluded that the report should be added to the website but not the maps at this stage. IH agreed to investigate the legal position on placing the map data on the internet. IH and WBW agreed to also investigate the technical side of presenting the data in an easy to read map format.

IH: Check legal position with regard to publicising count data and estate boundaries on internet.

WBW & IH: Investigate ways of presenting the mapped count data in an easily accessible, user-friendly format.

Website

A more general discussion ensued about website presentation of CDAG. A number of suggestions were made e.g. a specific CDAG website with pages on e.g. the deer framework, data, interpretation, how information is used, links to National Park Deer Management Groups and their deer management plans. There was enthusiasm for this. WBW warned of possible difficulties with setting up a new website i.e. cost, maintenance and a resistance in some quarters to having a plethora of interrelated websites.

WBW: Explore with CNPA communications team potential for improved web presence for CDAG and to invite a representative to a future meeting.

Association of Deer Management Groups - Annual General Meeting

The Chair reported briefly that this took place on 20th April in Kingussie, in particular highlighting the speech of John Milne (outgoing Chairman of Deer Commission for Scotland) which suggested the need for an overhaul of the Deer Management Group boundaries. CDAG, not wishing to undermine either the ADMG or individual DMGs, did not take a view on the issue, but encouraged further investigation/review. In particular it was seen as important that the boundaries of DMGs should reflect (as much as possible) discrete groups of deer.

4. Deer Framework

WBW introduced two papers which had been sent out prior to the meeting.

The first paper was an updated draft of the section titled 'Sustaining the Deer Resource' and was largely there for information rather than discussion in order to avoid going over previous ground, however worthwhile comments were made and the text will be further adapted.

It was agreed that the text should more explicitly state that deer need to be culled to ensure the maintenance of good quality habitat.

Some of the comments e.g. the importance of explaining that deer multiply and need to be culled for their own welfare and the for the benefit of the habitat upon which they depend, will also be covered in other sections of the framework.

WBW: Edit 'Sustaining the Deer Resource' text to reflect comments.

The second paper provided a draft set of 'Actions' that would help to deliver the set of principles covered in the previous paper. WBW emphasised that this was very much a first stab and that comments were welcome on the merit of including any actions in the Framework, if so how they should be presented, and any suggestions on omissions, additions, propositions etc.

The paper separated 'who' is to carry out the actions into: Public agencies (P), Non-governmental organisations (NGO) and Estates (E) in an effort to avoid a long and complex list of different bodies. It was established that CDAG, being essentially an advisory group, has a strategic role, but would not be expected to deliver the actions. Successful delivery of the deer framework will depend on the joint contributions of a wide range of individuals and organisations from all sectors.

Key points:

- CDAG's role should be made clear
- Actions need to reflect different levels from the strategic down to the practical on the ground.
- Add an action on website/presentation of interpretive material
- Add an action on the need for monitoring success
- This needs to work hand in hand with the drafting of the Deer Code by DCS/SNH.
- The actions should ideally be SMART (*Brace yourself... Specific, Measurable, Appropriate, Realistic and Time related*).
- Add an action on reviewing Deer Management Plans across the CNP (perhaps through a workshop or some other form of 'capacity building exercise') with a view to providing assistance to DMGs
- A flow chart explaining who does what from a strategic to a local level might be helpful.

The discussion concluded with the remark that although it's useful to have the actions it's important to remember that the 'process' of developing a deer framework and involving a wide range of people in its preparation is perhaps important, if not more important than the end 'product'. "It's about how people think and work together rather than the format of the plan itself".

5. Joint Working update.

IH provided his regular and useful update on progress in achieving 'favourable condition' status across the Natura 2000 designations in and around the National Park.

Overall the recent count indicated that across the National Park as a whole, deer numbers have been reduced, but there are significant local differences with numbers remaining relatively high in some areas and dropping in others e.g. in the Angus Glens where some estate owners have firm objectives to exclude deer in order to reduce tick burdens and promote successful grouse moors. In some parts of Perthshire e.g. between Pitlochry and Braemar, the populations have remained relatively high; perhaps in part due to movements caused by weather patterns. There have been pronounced reductions e.g. in Glen Feshie where the management focus has been on habitat restoration. There continue to be substantial and relatively stable populations in e.g. Glen Tilt and Glen Fearnate.

The deer count provided figures for 'stags' and 'others' only. Knobbers, hinds and calves were not differentiated, but (careful and time consuming) analysis of the photos taken during the helicopter counts could provide clearer sex ratios. Given the cost of the helicopter count DCS are unable to provide that analysis themselves but welcome DMGs wishing to study the images and make their own analyses.

Independent contractors are engaged in the preparation of a number of draft CUHMPs (Brace yourself once more dear reader...*Collaborative Upland Habitat Management Plans*) aimed at providing assurance that key areas are in 'favourable management': e.g. Beinn a' Ghlo SAC and Drummochter Hills SAC.

The Glen Feshie Section 7 Control Agreement ends in June. A partnership agreement with the estate is being put in place.

Mar Lodge Estate is close to securing a control agreement with DCS/SNH.

It was agreed that a CDAG 'position statement' should be prepared on the Deer Count: explaining the need for deer management, clarifying the fact that the density of deer is highly variable across the National Park and clarifying the roles of CDAG, DMGs, Agencies and individual estates.

WBW: Prepare a 'position statement' and press release on the deer count and circulate to CDAG for comment.

6. Date of Next meeting

The next CDAG meeting will be held in Braemar on 10th August.

It was suggested that the 11th November meeting could take place within the newly added section of the National Park.

7. AOCB.

Winter Mortality

It was noted that across the National Park winter mortality was generally low compared to some other areas across Scotland, but even within the National Park there was significant variability in the levels of mortality. Return figures on mortality also vary considerably and DCS is urging estates to provide as much information as possible in the deer returns. It was noted that the 'catastrophic deaths' of previous years i.e. in the 70s were not seen. This may have been partly due to there being less of an issue with drifting snow.

Contact with DMGs

Some concern was expressed that not all DMGs are fully aware of CDAG's remit and that they need to be better informed. It was noted that this varied from group to group and that DMG representatives on CDAG had a role to play in relating CDAG developments to their DMG. WBW indicated that he aims to attend all DMG meetings in the National Park and is always happy to provide a verbal update. The idea of 'Chairman's meeting' for all DMG chairs and the CDAG chair to get together was mooted and left open as an option.

Exchange scheme

The idea of an exchange scheme was raised, giving deer stalkers the opportunity to experience deer management in other European countries and then to repay the hosts over here. WBW agreed to explore possible ways of doing this.

WBW: Investigate options for developing an exchange scheme.

Venison events

WBW reported that with the backing of the Scottish Venison Working Group he is developing plans for two events later in the year aimed at encouraging increased use of venison by chefs/cooks in the National Park.

CDAG ABERNETHY SITE VISIT – 6th May 2010 – brief report

The meeting was followed by a visit to see and hear about RSPB's deer management policy on Abernethy Estate led by Desmond Dugan, Bob Moncrieff and Pete Mayhew.

RSPB are taking an increasingly strategic approach to deer management, this being just *one* of three main tools to bring about their overall aim of habitat enhancement.

The estate has been zoned into three categories for deer management: In the red zone, they take a zero tolerance approach in order to allow tree and habitat regeneration. In the amber zone, culling is less vital, but still needs to be maintained. In the green zone there is little or no deer control.

This approach has achieved impressive results, allowing regeneration in key areas, but also importantly allowing the deer *back* into areas where the forest is able to sustain them.

Alongside deer management the other two main 'tools' they are using are seed-bed enhancement and tree-planting. For the seed-bed enhancement they have experimented with cattle, cutting and burning. They find that slow, intense, back-burning fires give the greatest effect when looking to prepare the ground for germinating trees. Their planting regime is to be delivered in two ways: i) 'enrichment planting' to replace lost or missing species and ii) 'pioneer planting' to provide a future seed source in areas where currently there is none.



Patrick Thomson examines maps showing changes in deer density. (1989-91 on the left – present day on the right. Black followed by grey followed by red being the highest densities)



Natural regeneration of pine and juniper resulting from grazing management and seed-bed enhancement.

The RSPB were thanked for their hospitality and enthusiastically congratulated for their strategic approach and for the evidently successful results on the ground.

CAIRNGORMS DEER ADVISORY GROUP

Summary of Action Points from meeting held on Thursday 6th May 2010 at Forest Lodge, Abernethy.

- WBW: Arrange for minutes of last meeting to be edited on the CNPA website and to re-circulate to CDAG.
- WBW: Invite Josephine Pemberton to the next meeting to discuss further potential for Sika work.
- IH: Check legal position with regard to publicising count data and estate boundaries on internet.
- WBW & IH: Investigate ways of presenting the mapped count data in an easily accessible, user-friendly format.
- WBW: Explore with CNPA communications team potential for improved web presence for CDAG and to invite a representative to a future meeting.
- WBW: Edit 'Sustaining the Deer Resource' text to reflect comments.
- WBW: Prepare a 'position statement' and press release on the deer count and circulate to CDAG for comment.
- WBW: Investigate options for developing an exchange scheme.