

## **Minute of Cairngorm Deer Advisory Group Meeting**

**Date:** 6<sup>th</sup> November 2007

**Time:** 2pm

**Venue:** CNPA office, Grantown on Spey

**Present:** Phil Ratcliffe (Chair), Michael Hone (CSDMG), Ewan Cameron (AofCCC), Alastair Colquhoun (AofCCC), Richard Cooke (EGDMG, ADMG), Patrick Thompson (MWAHA, ELEDMG), Jamie Williamson (MDMG), John MacKenzie (SNH), Andrew Thin (SNH), Richard Wallace (FCS), Willie Lamont (FCS), Iain Hope (DCS), Hamish Trench (DCS), Bruce Anderson (SE LINK), John Bruce (BDS), Dick Balharry (JMT), Simon Blackett (EGDMG), Colin McClean (CNPA), Will Boyd Wallis (CNPA).

### **1. Welcome and apologies**

Apologies were received from Drennan Watson and David Greer.

### **2. Minutes of last meeting**

The Minutes of the meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> June were approved. It was agreed that future minutes will be deemed approved if no comments are received within 4 weeks following the circulation of a draft.

### **3. Matters arising**

Matters arising from the meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> June were dealt with in Paper CDAG 1 06112007.

The following points were discussed.

- CDAG noted that the Association of Cairngorm Community Councils (AofCCC) will carry out a questionnaire survey of community council attitudes to deer in Deeside and Strathdon in December 2007. This survey will be similar to that previously carried out in Strathspey in 2006. CDAG will await results with interest.
- Some members felt there was a need for better communication between agencies and community councils on deer issues.
- The idea of CNPA organising a deer based discussion day open to all with an interest in Cairngorms deer management.

**Action 1:** DCS/CNPA offer to discuss deer matters with A of CCC to be re-iterated.

**Action Colin McClean.**

**Action 2:** CNPA to consider organising a deer based discussion day and discuss any proposal with CDAG. **Action Colin McClean.**

### **4. Update on Joint Working.**

Paper CDAG2 06112007 was presented. This is a standing agenda item.

**Action 3:** Circulate a paper entitled “A summary of tree seedling monitoring at Glenfeshie”, which Phil Ratcliffe was commissioned by Glenfeshie Estate to prepare. Circulation subject to permission from Glenfeshie Estate. **Action: Phil Ratcliffe/ Colin McClean.**

##### **5. Andrew Thin, Chairman SNH: Question and Answer session.**

Andrew focussed his brief presentation on issues affecting deer management in the context of his analysis of long term trends in public opinion and the wider public policy agenda. He emphasised that public agencies exist to serve the interests of all Scotland’s people. In contrast NGO’s serve sectional interests which do not always coincide with the wider public interest. Andrew considered the wider public had the following attitudes to deer:

- That deer populations should be well managed and in good health.
- That deer should not cause unreasonable amounts of damage or road accidents.
- That deer are not pest species.

Public policy on deer was therefore focussed on preventing damage to designated sites and preventing road accidents. SNH’s particular focus was on the protection of internationally designated sites.

Andrew then considered longer term trends in Scottish public opinion and made the following analysis:

- There is growing public concern about killing animals for fun.
- There is growing public dislike of elitism and the public perceive deer stalking as an elite activity.
- Scotland increasingly wants to be recognised on an international stage. Scotland’s wildlife and environment are internationally recognised and play an important role in our international representation.

Designation as a National Park creates opportunities within the Cairngorms for those leading public policy through a certain willingness to take risk, a focus for trialling initiatives and through some additional resources.

Andrew argued that DMGs within the Cairngorms must address the public interest more effectively and can only do this through being more inclusive. DMGs which become more inclusive will reap benefit. DMGs must also act to protect designated sites. Within the CNP there is an opportunity to demonstrate that deer stalking is not an elite activity. Deer stalking should be positioned as part of the range of outdoor activities offered by the leisure industry eg alongside mountain biking. Within the Park there is also an opportunity to tackle public concern about killing animals for fun and to demonstrate that deer are an important source of healthy food.

Discussion then followed. The need to reconcile 1. the desired positioning of deer stalking within the mainstream leisure industry with 2. public hostility to killing animals for fun was raised. Andrew thought a major part of resolving these issues

lay in improving public perception of the deer industry. The current “tweedy” image was unhelpful. Deer stalking needed to be seen to become more inclusive. Many CDAG members thought the public perception of deer stalking was inaccurate. For example BDS draw their membership from a broad spectrum of society and many estates have a similar broad range of stalking guests. There was some agreement that the public perception of deer stalking was shaped by stag stalking. A socio economic profile of those who shoot stags would not demonstrate inclusivity. The deer industry sees a different picture of a broad section of society shooting a variety of deer species in a variety of habitats. There is a need to better inform the wider public of who shoots deer across Scotland. Some CDAG members felt agencies including SNH could help the deer industry portray a more accurate image. Andrew felt the industry could better help itself by targeting its marketing at the wider public and by wider involvement of local communities in deer management decision making.

Discussion then focussed on designations and the need to fund estates to manage land for biodiversity. Andrew felt the solution to the current lack of funding lay in 1. building support within Scotland’s people to fund appropriate land management. 2. harnessing the support of individual very wealthy landowners.

Concern was expressed that SNH did not fully consider the socio economic impacts of management to achieve favourable condition on designated sites. Andrew explained that legal interpretation of European law advised SNH to consider socio economic impacts only when there is an overriding national interest in so doing. Local socio economic impacts should not be a factor influencing SNH’s advice on how designated sites should be managed. DCS stated that achieving favourable condition was non negotiable, but that attention should be given to achieving favourable condition with minimal socio economic impact. Andrew argued that Scotland’s countryside underpins Scotland’s economy as our countryside adds significantly to people’s quality of life and attracts people to work here. Therefore the socio economic impact’s of action on designated sites have to be examined at a national scale as well as locally.

Some CDAG members felt agencies should give more credit for the way deer are managed. For instance where Site Condition Monitoring shows deer are not damaging a site this could be publically recognised by agencies. Agencies could make more effort to emphasis the positive aspects of deer management rather than consistently focussing on the negative. Andrew acknowledged that on the whole deer are well managed but that the public relations of the deer industry could be vastly improved. More inclusive DMGs would be a big step forward.

Finally, the leadership role of CDAG was discussed. CDAG’s remit included tackling strategic deer management issues and achieving a better reconciliation between deer management and the wider public policy agenda. Members felt it was making little progress in this task. Andrew felt CDAG could lead on inclusivity, on changing perceptions and on marketing stalking to new audiences.

**Action 4:** CDAG to set up a sub-group to develop thinking on the above and produce paper for discussion. **Action: Phil Ratcliffe/ Colin McClean/ Michael Hone.**

Andrew was thanked for leading such a thought provoking discussion. Andrew Thin, Dick Balharry and Will Boyd Wallis left the meeting.

## **6. Discussion on DCS Draft "Strategy for Wild Deer".**

Hamish Trench, DCS lead discussion on the draft "Strategy for Wild Deer". This draft followed on from the DCS Vision and Long Term Strategy produced in 2000/01. The new document was not just a strategy for DCS as an organisation, but a government strategy for deer which would involve all countryside agencies. The draft "Strategy for Wild Deer" is now the subject of public consultation and is widely available so Hamish's presentation is not summarised in these minutes.

Discussion centred on

- How DCS would consult on the strategy?
- How to involve the public and specifically, community councils?
- Should CDAG develop a collective response?

**Action 5:** CDAG members to email Colin McClean with their responses to the draft Strategy by 15<sup>th</sup> January. Responses should use the consultation response form. A CDAG meeting in January would consider whether there was sufficient common ground to produce a formal response to the draft Strategy. **Action all.**

Hamish was thanked for his presentation. Richard Wallace then left the meeting.

## **7. Conclusions on inclusive deer management planning.**

Paper CDAG3 06112007 was presented. An objective within the Cairngorms National Park Plan was for all DMGs within the Park to develop inclusive deer management plans as a model for reducing conflict between deer management objectives. CNPA still see such an approach as a good model for supporting sustainable deer management in the long term in the long term but recognise there are significant barriers in the short term. These barriers include uncertainty over future management, often arising from Joint Working (JW), and a lack of resources from both DMGs and consultees. There was also a reluctance within DMGs to make certain information public.

CNPA have promoted this inclusive planning approach. Some DMGs are happy to be inclusive while others are not. CNPA recommended that if resistance to inclusivity was currently an insurmountable barrier to progress then further promotion of inclusive deer management plans was pointless at this stage. CNPA further recommended that JW currently fulfils many of the requirements of an inclusive deer management planning process including establishing deer

management prescriptions and consulting on those. There was an argument for suspending further promotion of inclusive deer management planning while JW unfolded.

CDAG members rejected this analysis and argued that inclusive deer management plans covering the Park should be the long term goal. There was recognition of current difficulties including resistance from some DMGs, the lack of a statutory context for inclusive deer management plans and the lack of mechanisms for consultation. Some members argued that JW was a barrier to inclusive deer management planning as JW was a non consultative process. All members agreed JW did not substitute for inclusive deer management planning.

CDAG was keen to continue promoting inclusive deer management plans and insisted CNPA should not be deterred by current barriers. CNPA accepted this argument but made the plea for more vigorous support for inclusive deer management plans to come from ADMG, DMG representatives and agencies. A particular plea was made to the Speyside DMG to publicise the good news story behind their existing inclusive plan.

#### **8. Roe deer issues in the CNP.**

Paper CDAG4 06112007 was presented. CNPA had been asked to scope the strategic issues associated with roe management in the CNP, which CDAG could seek to influence. The paper identified several roe management issues which land managers currently deal with effectively. Land managers rarely feel there is benefit in a collaborative approach to roe management which is in contrast to red deer management. Roe deer management benefits from wider deer initiatives eg venison marketing. CNPA recommended that there were no specific strategic roe management issues for CDAG to deal with. After some discussion this recommendation was accepted.

#### **9. Brief project updates.**

Paper CDAG5 06112007 was presented for information. There was no discussion.

#### **10. Proposal for "Deer in the Cairngorms" leaflet.**

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park had produced a leaflet in 2004 entitled "Deer in the National Park" which CDAG members thought this was useful and informative. Discussion centred on whether a similar leaflet should be prepared for the Cairngorms. Currently, similar information is available on the CNPA website but this information is probably not as accessible as the Trossachs leaflet.

<p><b>Action 6:</b> Phil Ratcliffe to ask LLTNPA what audience the Trossachs leaflet has been aimed at, what has been the uptake of the leaflet and whether it has proved useful? <b>Action Phil Ratcliffe.</b></p>
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**11. AOB.**

**Action 7:** CNPA were asked to prepare a paper scoping the strategic issues presented by sika in the Park. **Action Colin McClean.**

**12. Date of next meeting.**

10am 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2008 CNPA Grantown. **Please note change of time from previous meetings.**