

CAIRNGORMS DEER ADVISORY GROUP

Minutes of meeting held on Thursday 11th November 2010
at Blair Castle

Present

Dick Balharry, Simon Blackett, Will Boyd-Wallis (Minutes), Ewan Cameron, David Greer, Michael Hone (Chair), Iain Hope, Justin Irvine, Colin McClean, Colin Sheddon, Patrick Thompson, Paul Timms, Jamie Williamson.

1. Welcome and apologies.

Colin McClean representing ADMG was welcomed back to CDAG.

Apologies were received from:

Bruce Anderson, John Bruce, Alasdair Colquhoun, Willie Lamont, George MacDonald, Drennan Watson.

2. Minutes of the last meeting – May 2010

Agreed

3. Action points and Matters arising from last meeting

All action points have been followed up except the action to invite Josephine Pemberton to this meeting because the lead up to this meeting has been entirely focussed on the deer framework.

Action 1: Will to invite Josephine to the next meeting to discuss future sika deer research priorities.

4. Deer Framework

Will provided an update on recent progress with the Deer Framework in the run up to this meeting:

Comments made on the draft at the last CDAG meeting and more received from CDAG members in Early September were incorporated into a further draft by Will. That draft was sent round and in hard copy to Deer Management Group chairs as requested. It was also emailed to DMG secretaries, Scottish Environment LINK Deer Task Force members and CDAG members on 30 September specifically asking for further comments and the draft to be forwarded to any other interested parties. It was submitted to the CNPA board for discussion on 29th October.

The CNPA board congratulated CDAG and endorsed the draft Deer Framework. Will made a number of minor amendments taking on comments from the CNPA board and others. The Final Draft showing changes was sent to CDAG on 5th November in advance of this meeting.

Will indicated that once approved the intention was to have the Deer Framework in published form in March 2011.

Publicity:

It was agreed that the framework should be formally launched to get maximum publicity as a good news story. It was suggested that it will be important to publicise and promote to Community Councils, media representatives and Deer Management Groups to ensure that a consistent message goes out. It was also suggested that a standard PowerPoint presentation be prepared to accompany a talk. In order to maintain consistency it was suggested that Will do all the talks to community councils, DMGs, SNH area offices etc, but Will made it clear that although desirable and even enjoyable he does not have the time to do this. The recently formed Cairngorms National Park Land Management Forum will be a useful vehicle for getting the messages out. It was agreed that a distribution list should be prepared and forwarded to CDAG.

Action 2: Will to consult with communications colleagues in CNPA, LINK, ADMG and SNH, prepare a distributions list and plan for the launch.

Action 3: All to suggest a suitable figurehead for the launch.

To be or not to be SMART

There was some discussion about whether the delivery section should include actions that are more Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time restricted (SMART). This was suggested because without actions in this format there is a view that the framework could be criticised for being vague and or not delivering. The counter view expressed was that the document as it stands represents a long term vision and a considerable move forward in expressing shared ground and a foundation upon which future actions can be developed and monitored by CDAG. Will indicated that many of the 'actions' were as SMART as possible, but it had been difficult to get agreement on more precise wording with a number of partners. The delivery section as it stands contains many actions which are *aspirational*; to tighten these up into SMART actions, whilst potentially making them clearer would also potentially lead to them not being agreed and therefore omitted. It was agreed that the delivery section should remain as it is, but this should be the foundation for allowing more specific actions being developed in future.

There then followed a discussion of the highlighted changes in the final draft (circulated). Most were minor changes in order to make the text more accurate or clear. Others required a little more discussion:

Who do deer belong to?

The draft states that “free-living wild deer in law belong to no-one” It had been suggested to Will buy one member that in fact in law “deer belong to everyone”. The CDAG agreement was that deer are *res nullius*, meaning belonging to no one.

Cairngorms Campaign

The Cairngorms Campaign had been listed in the final draft as a separate member, they are in fact one of the two Scottish Environment LINK reps.

Niche market

Is there a “niche market for a commercially run stalking experience sold on the fact that the client is contributing to enhancing habitats but accepts that fewer deer may be available...” This sentence was included in the draft to suggest that where deer numbers have been reduced to foster habitat enhancement, there is still an opportunity for commercial stalking, but client expectations need to be managed. It was agreed that the whole stalking experience is a major selling point to clients and that actually shooting deer is secondary to some. The discussion highlighted the importance of the stalker’s role in providing a high quality experience for the client, which brings in local knowledge of the land and culture. It was agreed that there is no need to include “niche market” because all stalking whether in areas of relatively low deer density or high density is regarded as a holistic experience.

Road Traffic Accidents

It was agreed that a sentence highlighting the dangers of deer on the road should be included in the ‘social significance’ section.

Deer Fencing

A sentence had been added in the final draft spelling out the purpose of the *Joint Agency Statement and Guidance on Deer Fencing*. It was agreed that there was no need to include reference to “whether to approve or financially support” the erection of fences. It was agreed that it is less ambiguous to simply state that the guidance assists decision making.

Hill phones

The awareness and understanding section refers to Heading for the Scottish Hills website but not *Hill Phones*. As the former is still a pilot with varied success it was agreed that the more established *Hill Phones* system should also be highlighted.

Delivery by Estates and Deer Management Groups

In the delivery section under Estates and Deer Management Groups there are two bullet points referring to *annual* systematic comparable counts of deer numbers and for monitoring grazing and trampling impacts. There was concern expressed that whilst some estates do carry out annual monitoring, it is unrealistic to expect all estates to do so. It was agreed that “annually” should be removed leaving the words “systematic and comparable”.

Delivery by Scottish Natural Heritage

SNH had submitted comments on the whole draft in September which were incorporated in the final draft, however they wish to alter the wording in the section relating to their delivery. Iain Hope indicated these changes were minor and did not alter the flavour of the document and would be sent to Will as soon as possible.

Action 4: Iain to send SNH changes to Will ASAP.

Approval

The Final Draft of the Deer Framework was approved by CDAG subject to all the changes outlined above. It was agreed that a completed copy be sent by email to CDAG who would then have a short time period to check for accuracy.

Action 5: Will to incorporate changes made during meeting and from SNH and send by email to CDAG.

Action 6: All to check changes accurately reflect the discussions at the meeting.

5. Interpretation/Signage

Will presented a proposal to start an initiative to provide improved interpretation on deer management at major 'trail-heads' in the National Park. This would have four main aims:

- Highlighting mutual responsibilities of deer managers and walkers/climbers accessing the hills
- Helping to ensure hill walkers understand the need for deer management
- Raising awareness of the social, economic and environmental importance of deer management.
- Replacing out of date or inappropriate signs

Will produced a map showing 16 key 'trail-heads' in the National Park where a co-ordinated series of signs could be placed to get out a consistent message.

The idea was triggered by the East Grampian DMG who wish to update their own signs, however they are temporarily holding off because of uncertainty over the future of the *Heading for the Scottish Hills* website.

The idea was welcomed by CDAG and it was agreed that it would be appropriate to get a consistent co-ordinated approach across the NP. It was agreed that using the National Park status is a powerful way of getting messages out to hill goers.

It was agreed that the best way forward would be for Will and CNPA colleagues (in particular Andy Ford) to liaise with the EGDMG to develop something appropriate for their area which would provide a model format for later development across the wider National Park.

Action 7: Will and Simon to continue liaise with Andy Ford to discuss and develop interpretation for the EGDMG.

6. Joint Working update.

Iain Hope provided an update on progress of assessment, monitoring and management agreements for Joint Working sites in the NP aimed at ensuring

designated features currently in unfavourable condition were moving towards favourable condition.

In brief:

Deeside –	Management ongoing to improve blaeberry habitat specifically to benefit Capercaillie.
Caenlochan - Glen Feshie -	Control agreement in place, monitoring ongoing Section 7 agreement concluded, now a 5 year partnership agreement.
Beinn a Ghlo - Drummochter Hills -	Management measures agreed West of A9: the East Loch Ericht DMG have agreed a plan to secure management East of A9: steering group set up
Kinveachy -	Half way through control agreement. Deer management measures are working to establish Scots pine regeneration. Factors other than deer are having a significant impact on regeneration.
Monadhliath -	The DMG dispute the validity of SNH data showing deer impacts on bog habitat.
Mar Lodge –	Section 7 agreement not yet in place.

It was noted that CDAG is a good forum for voicing different 'sides of the story' in relation to joint working sites and other issues; minutes are public, and distributed to CNPA board.

It was suggested that it would be worthwhile getting a specialist speaker (from SNH) to provide a presentation on the legal basis of our obligations to ensure national and international designation are kept in favourable condition.

Action 8: Will to arrange a suitable speaker on designations and the law for a future CDAG meeting

Action 9: Will to send Colin McClean a copy of the CDAG reference pack on SACs and priority sites.

7. AOCB.

Richard Cooke

Thanks were expressed to Richard Cooke who was instrumental in setting up CDAG and represented ADMG throughout until this meeting. He always played a very active role in discussions and provided helpful and pragmatic advice in the development of the Deer Framework.

CNPA Board rep

It was agreed that since Sue Walker had left the CNPA board and CDAG there was a need for CNPA board representation. Will indicated that there are a number of new board members and that this was in hand; a new representative would be confirmed soon.

Stalking round up

The chair asked for deer managers around the table to provide a rough assessment of the general condition of deer and the stag cull across the NP. There was a general consensus that there has been a late rut (10th Oct or later) across the whole park area. A number reported a lack of mature stags, and some estates have reported a problem achieving their client targets. Weights and condition of stag and hind carcasses have been variable, but calves are not so numerous as in years past, and many not in good condition. Prolonged NE winds have been unusual and may have created stalking problems in some areas.

8. Date of next meeting

Next meeting: 23rd March 2011 – Glenshero a suggested venue.

Then: 29th June 2011

Summary of Action Points

Action 1: Will to invite Josephine to the next meeting to discuss future sika deer research priorities.

Action 2: Will to consult with communications colleagues in CNPA, LINK, ADMG and SNH, prepare a distributions list and plan for the launch.

Action 3: All to suggest a suitable figurehead for the launch.

Action 4: Iain to send SNH changes to Will ASAP.

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