

CAIRNGORMS DEER ADVISORY GROUP

Minutes of meeting held on

Wednesday 23rd November 2011

at

The Lecht Ski Centre.

Present

Michael Hone (Chair), Simon Blackett, Will Boyd-Wallis, John Bruce, Ewan Cameron, Roger Clegg, George MacDonald, Patrick Thompson, Penny Lawson (minutes).

1. Welcome and apologies.

Apologies received from: Dick Balharry, Alasdair Colquhoun, Pete Mayhew, Duncan Orr Ewing, Colin Shedden, Chris Donald, Hamish Trench, Jamie Williamson, Katrina Farquhar, Justin Irvine, Colin McClean, Gordon Riddler, Willie Lamont.

2. Minutes of last meeting – 29th June 2011

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

3. Action points and Matters arising from last meeting

Forestry Commission Deer density maps – not presented as Willie Lamont not in attendance.

Updated DMG area maps showing new National Park boundary, and SAC information dossiers distributed to CNPA Board members as requested.

Action 1: Penny to send printed copy of updated DMG map to all CDAG members.

Deer code consultation – response was submitted by CNPA.

Joint Working - stakeholder meeting regarding SACs to the west of the Park, not yet arranged, still needed.

Action 2: Matthew and Chris to arrange a stakeholder meeting on SACs to the west of the park.

Appointment of wildlife tourism representative to group – Will has looked into this but not identified an obvious person. Caroline Warburton of Wild Scotland was suggested.

Action 3: Will to approach Caroline Warburton.

All other points were covered later in the meeting.

4. Deer Management Planning – aspirations, counts and habitat assessments

Aspirational deer densities

The aspirational deer density maps have been well received by the Cairngorms/Speyside and East Grampian DMGs who are keen to use them as a deer management tool. There is now a need to involve the other DMGs in the park, and estates not within DMG areas, in this approach. The Mid West and Monadhliath DMGs have written Deer Management Plans in place, but could benefit from also using the maps as a visual and accessible method of communicating plans and a focus for discussion. There is a need to collect data on aspirational deer densities for the areas of the Park not yet covered to complete the map and give a holistic overview. It was agreed that one of the most useful functions of the map is to highlight the wide range of differing deer management objectives on neighbouring estates and focus attention on the interdependence of management activities across boundaries.

CDAG formally endorsed a commitment to

- a) Encourage deer management planning in general, and
- b) Take steps to complete the aspirational deer density map for the whole Park.

Action 4: Patrick to present map to Mid West DMG and approach three main estates on west side of Park directly to request aspirational deer density information.

Action 5: Patrick to forward electronic version of East Loch Ericht Deer Management Plan to Will.

Action 6: Matthew to contact Monadhliath DMG and encourage them to take on aspirational mapping approach.

Deer counts

Helicopter counts have been done for the National Park area co-ordinated by SNH in 2000, 2005 and 2010. There has been criticism of the counting method due to high carbon emissions from using helicopters. Alternative counting methods were discussed, including linear transects using infra-red detection. It was agreed that the count information is important for deer management and that CDAG should strongly support a repeat of the count in 2015 and every 5 years thereafter to ensure there is consistent and comparable data. However, it was recognised that the substantial funding needed is likely to be a challenge.

Habitat Assessment

The growing need for regular habitat assessment to complement counts, and the possibility of this becoming required from land managers was discussed. At present it is done to varying extents on different estates and varies from surveys done by

external professionals to keepers taking fixed point photographs. The advantages of using a consistent methodology across the Park were discussed, and it was agreed that

- a) all estates should be encouraged to undertake at least some form of repeatable and comparable habitat monitoring and that
- b) a 'broad brush' landscape scale habitat assessment across the entire National Park should be seriously considered.

Action 7: Will to investigate options for park-wide deer counts and habitat assessment, including funding, and present to next meeting.

5. Sika Deer – further research

Research on hybridisation between red and sika deer is continuing at a reduced level as agreed at the last meeting. CNPA has contracted Josephine Pemberton to analyse around 140 further samples of ear tissue from randomly selected deer culled on estates in the Monadhliath area. All estates in the area have been invited to take samples and so far eight have responded. Grid references for where the deer were shot and their species by appearance will be recorded for each sample, and the resultant data will be compatible with previous surveys.

Action 8: John/George/all to use contacts to encourage participation from all estates in the area, especially Glenshero, Glen Banchor and Dunachton . Will to forward email inviting participation for sending on.

6. Joint Working update

Not discussed as Chris Donald not in attendance.

7. Deer Interpretation

The 25 year old East Grampian DMG stalking awareness signs now need replaced, and opportunities were discussed for a park-wide approach to using partially standardised signs aimed at informing the public about responsible access during the stalking season, and portraying the positive environmental and economic aspects of deer management. A basic design including Scottish Outdoor Access Code wording, a map or panorama, a QR (electronic) code for instant access to the Heading for the Scottish Hills website from Smartphones, and logos for the estate and the National Park, was presented for comment. The signs would be produced in a durable and permanent format and located at main entry points for hill-walkers. There would be considerable flexibility on what to include and exclude according to the preferences of each estate, and various requirements and viewpoints were discussed. It was agreed that the public benefit aspects of stalking should be made clear by the signs. There is funding available from CNPA for the signs. Invercauld Estate could be used to trial the signs initially and the aim would be to have them in place by July 2012.

Action 9: Will/Penny to finalise and circulate a suggested template design including standard elements and elements which could be customised to the requirements of each estate, along with a guidance note giving examples of options for maps, wording etc.

Action 10: All to feedback further comments and an indication of level of interest.

Action 11: Will to circulate information on signs to Richard Cooke for comment from the ADMG.

8. AOCB.

Authorisations

Concern was expressed about the fact that many estates do not share information about applications for out of season cull authorisations with others in their DMG and that it is not obligatory for SNH to consult before issuing authoriations. It was agreed that openness about this helps to build stronger working relationships.

Road traffic collisions

A recent report published by SNH (Deer Initiative Report, J Langbein, July 2011) highlights a hotspot for deer collisions on the A9 north of Aviemore which may be linked to changes in fencing and deer management in this area. This stimulated discussion on whether CDAG should give more consideration to collision danger, eg gather information on the extent of the problem within the Park. It was agreed that the emphasis should primarily be on the danger to drivers. This could be explored further at a future meeting.

Action 11: John to approach author of report regarding presenting the data at a National Park scale to a future CDAG meeting.

National Park Plan 2 consultation

The Plan for 2012-2017 is currently out for consultation, ending 9th December. All members were encouraged to respond individually rather than CDAG submitting a group response. It was noted that sustainable deer management is no longer specifically identified as a priority outcome as in the 2007 Plan. This can be interpreted as a reflection of the success of actions taken during the last 4 years.

Autumnwatch

The BBC Autumnwatch programme on Friday 25th Nov is about wildlife in the Cairngorms National Park, with a particular emphasis on deer management. This is the first time the programme has acknowledged the need for culls in sustainable land management.

Wild land designations

It was clarified that CNPA does not support moves towards introducing a 'wild land' designation, but it does have useful supplementary planning guidance on 'wildness' in the National Park.

(<http://www.cairngorms.co.uk/resource/docs/publications/24112011/CNPA.Paper.1771.Wildness.pdf>)

9. Date of next meeting

Wed 7th March 2012, Atholl area, venue tbc.

Summary of Action Points

Action 1: Penny to send printed copy of updated DMG map to all CDAG members.

Action 2: Matthew and Chris to arrange a stakeholder meeting on SACs to the west of the park.

Action 3: Will to approach Caroline Warburton.

Action 4: Patrick to present map to Mid West DMG and approach three main estates on west side of Park directly to request aspirational deer density information.

Action 5: Patrick to forward electronic version of East Loch Ericht Deer Management Plan to Will.

Action 6: Matthew to contact Monadhliath DMG and encourage them to take on aspirational mapping approach.

Action 7: Will to investigate options for park-wide deer counts and habitat assessment, including funding, and present to next meeting.

Action 8: John/George/all to use contacts to encourage participation from all estates in the area, especially Glenshero, Glen Banchor and Dunachton .
Will to forward email inviting participation for sending on.

Action 9: Will/Penny to finalise and circulate a suggested template design including standard elements and elements which could be customised to the requirements of each estate, along with a guidance note giving examples of options for maps, wording etc.

Action 10: All to feedback further comments and an indication of level of interest.

Action 11: Will to circulate information on signs to Richard Cooke for comment from the ADMG.

Action 11: John to approach author of report regarding presenting the data at a National Park scale to a future CDAG meeting.