

Approved Minute of Cairngorm Deer Advisory Group Meeting.

Date: 25 November 2008

Time: 10.30 am

Venue: The Ballroom, Mar Lodge

Present: Phil Ratcliffe (Chair), Alastair Colquhoun (AofCC), Dick Balharry, Bruce Anderson (both SE Link), Richard Cooke (ADMG), Paul Timms (SNH), Russell Cooper (FCS), Donald Fraser (DCS), John Bruce (BDS), Simon Blackett (EGDMG), Patrick Thompson (MidWest Assoc), Thomas MacDonnell (CSDMG), Sue Walker (CNP Board), Andrew Gordon (WGDMG), Chris Hewitt NTS, Hamish Trench and Colin McClean (both CNPA).

1. Welcome and apologies.

Apologies were received from David Greer, Richard Wallace, Willie Lamont, George Macdonald, Michael Hone, Jamie Williamson, Ewan Cameron, and Iain Hope.

2. Matters arising.

All matters arising from the previous meeting were either discharged or were agenda items. The SNH/ DCS merger was discussed. There was concern about potential loss of DCS staff and Board expertise in areas like deer welfare and Best Practice. This concern was balanced by a desire to reduce bureaucracy. Robert Balfour currently chairs a stakeholder's Reference Group which seeks advice from stakeholders on how the new merged body should operate. This advice will be fed back to senior staff in SNH and DCS who are managing the merger process. It was agreed that CDAG should write to Robert Balfour to express interest in the merger and offer our advice.

Action 1: Phil to write to Robert Balfour expressing an interest in being involved in providing advice to the merger Reference Group and to invite him to address CDAG. **Action: Phil Ratcliffe**

3. Joint Working update.

The spreadsheet showing progress on all Joint Working sites in and around the CNP was discussed. It was explained that progress on Glenfeshie and Caenlochan was documented differently from other sites as work on these sites pre-dates Joint Working. CDAG agreed the spreadsheet was a useful update on progress.

4. Update on proposed legislative change.

At the request of the Minister, DCS is currently formulating recommendations for new legislation governing deer management in

Scotland. These recommendations will be presented to the Minister before Christmas 2008. The Minister may reject these recommendations or agree they form the basis of new legislation which could become law in 2009/ 2010. If the Minister agrees to proceed with the DCS recommendations, a full consultation will then take place.

In their recommendations, DCS are concentrating on the key issues of 1) the competence of those who shoot deer and 2) sustainable deer management. Issues such as a register of competence, the need for close seasons, the role of DMGs, owner/ occupier rights to shoot deer and the protection of the public interest are all being debated. DCS recommendations will be amended/ agreed by the DCS Board on Monday 1st December.

Action 2: Circulate relevant papers and Minutes of the DCS Board meeting on 1st December when these become available. Invite comment from members and develop a view on the DCS recommendations.
Action: Colin McClean/ Phil Ratcliffe

5. Sustainable deer management and other National Park Plan priorities.

The link between the work of CDAG and other Park Plan priorities was emphasised. Supporting sustainable deer management is one priority in the Park Plan but there are clear links to other priorities including conserving and enhancing the Park and integrating public support for land management. A Delivery Team has been established to give an overview of work towards these last two priorities and the CNPA wish to create a better link between CDAG and this Delivery Team. The CNPA will circulate Delivery Team papers to CDAG and will highlight relevant issues for CDAG. The CNPA may invite individuals from CDAG to attend the Delivery Team if there are relevant items on the agenda.

The importance of carbon management was raised. It was agreed there is a need for a better understanding of peat erosion and accumulation and that this should be a research priority. Without a more complete understanding of peat dynamics, it is difficult to make sensible land management decisions. The CNPA has developed the "Low Carbon Estates" project which aims to trial methodologies on valuing the carbon stored on estates within the CNP and is also collaborating with the Aberdeen Centre for Environmental Sustainability on a project seeking to better understand the ecosystem services provided by moorland.

Action 3: Circulate Delivery Team papers to CDAG and invite relevant CDAG members to attend the Delivery Team when appropriate.
Colin McClean/ Hamish Trench

Action 4: Refer the need for peat research to SNH. **Action Phil Ratcliffe**

6. Deer numbers in the Cairngorms National Park.

Michal Hone had prepared a paper on this issue. Members welcomed the paper and supported many of the points it raised. There was a general feeling that Michael's paper supported the 4 stage deer management planning process for the CNP and discussion was subsumed into the discussion on agenda item 7.

7. Update on 4 stage deer management planning process and other CNPA projects.

The background to the 4 stage process and concurrent habitat monitoring was explained and is documented in previous minutes available on

<http://www.cairngorms.co.uk/parkauthority/papers/deer/index.php>

This approach met with some resistance from CSDMG members and other significant landowners who were concerned that a) mapping desired deer densities could attract public criticism if desired deer densities were not achieved b) habitat monitoring information could also lead to estates being criticised.

Some estates are concerned about this information being made public. However, it was pointed out that once information is available to agencies it is effectively within the public domain under Freedom of Information legislation.

It was agreed the objectives of habitat monitoring information were to
1) ensure deer management was based on habitat condition and
2) to enable the public to have an overview of habitat condition within the Park.

There was agreement that habitat monitoring data should be published in a way that prevents the identification of data from individual landholdings. It was noted that DCS planned to count East and West Grampians in 2010 and this would result in the mapping of actual deer densities.

Updates on "Determining the socio economic impacts of deer reductions" and "Improving public awareness and understanding of deer management" were accepted without comment.

There was some discussion about "Determining levels of red/ sika hybridisation east of the Spey." It was agreed that the project could potentially detect if hybridisation had occurred, but could not prove hybridisation had not occurred without analysing tissue from a much larger sample of animals.

“Developing the use of deer as a wildlife tourism resource” generated discussion on the economic viability of wildlife tourism enterprises organised by estates, the need to manage public expectations on just how visible and accessible deer may be in the Cairngorms and the importance of professional stalkers being prepared to explain their profession to the wider public. Despite public money being available from CNPA and other sources individual estates were reluctant to invest time and money in developing wildlife tourism as they were unsure of the economic returns.

7. Loch Lomond and the Trossachs NP leaflet “Deer in the National Park”.

This leaflet was well received by the deer industry but there had apparently not been a large take up by the public at Visitor Centres. LLTNPA now favour a web-based approach to informing the public about deer management, but CDAG felt most people on holiday did not have access to the web and that this approach alone was unsatisfactory. Members felt that deer are a bigger issue in the Cairngorms than the LLTNP so the lessons from LLTNP are not necessarily appropriate in the Cairngorms. It was agreed the CNPA should explore producing a series of leaflets explaining the wildlife of the Park and that any deer leaflet should be part of this series.

Action 5: CNPA to discuss with communications specialists the best means of informing visitors about deer and deer management.
Colin McClean/ Hamish Trench

8. Any other business.

CDAG were invited to visit Glenfeshie Estate on 5 May 2009.

9. Date of next meeting.

10.30 am, 24 March 2009, CNPA offices, Grantown-on-Spey

Colin McClean
26 November 2008

NB. I will circulate Chris Hewitt’s presentation about deer management on Mar Lodge if it is not too unwieldy to do so.