

CAIRNGORMS DEER ADVISORY GROUP

DRAFT Minutes of meeting held on

Wednesday 29th June 2011

at
Glen Tanar House.

Present

Simon Blackett, Will Boyd-Wallis, John Bruce, Ewan Cameron, Alasdair Colquhoun, Chris Donald, Katrina Farquhar, Michael Hone (Chair), Marcus Humphrey, Justin Irvine, Willie Lamont, Penny Lawson (minutes), George MacDonald, Colin McClean, Gordon Riddler, Patrick Thompson.

1. Welcome and apologies.

Apologies received from:

Dick Balharry, Roger Clegg, Andrew Gordon, David Greer, Iain Hope, Josephine Pemberton, Colin Shedden, Hamish Trench, Jamie Williamson.

First-time attendees Chris Donald (SNH), Katrina Farquhar (CNP Board), Marcus Humphrey (CNP Board), Gordon Riddler (CNP Board) and Penny Lawson (CNPA) were welcomed.

2. Action points and Matters arising from last meeting– 23 March 2011

Standing members of CDAG

For now CNP Board representation will be rotated, with the Board members located nearest to where meetings are held being invited. It was considered desirable in the longer term to have one regular Board member attending with a named stand-in to cover in their absence. CDAG minutes are circulated to all CNP Board members and Board members attending will report back to Board meetings.

Discussed further under Item 7.

All other points were covered later in the meeting.

3. Deer Framework – Mapping Deer Management Aspirations

The Deer Framework has been published and distributed. Considerable positive feedback has come in from various sectors. As a thorough and widely consulted document, the Framework will be central to deer issues within the park and will feed in to the new National Park Plan. It will remain a working document and will be kept under review, with CDAG being responsible for monitoring delivery (Section 10.)

GIS maps were presented showing aspirational deer densities, actual deer densities as measured by the counts in January 2010, and the two sets of data overlain, for all the estates within the park. The maps are a useful visual tool for collaborative deer management and their potential applications were discussed. However, the maps represent a 'snapshot' in time and need careful interpretation, and the information they contain is not yet in the public realm. Points arising included using the maps as a starting point for Deer Management Plans, both within and adjacent to the park, and overlaying designated areas (SACs) to highlight areas of potential conflict. It was noted that the exercise is a good example of improved openness and sharing of information between land managers.

FCS have deer density maps for their land including data from helicopter deer counts, dung counts and habitat assessment, and are willing to share this information with CDAG.

Requests were made for circulation of maps of DMG areas and SACs within the new National Park boundary.

The differing deer densities on adjacent land evident from the maps highlight the need for a conflict resolution process. Although in some cases this need is covered by Section 7 agreements, it was agreed that there are big advantages to voluntary over statutory agreements, and this is an area CDAG should work on in future.

Action: WL to present FCS deer density maps at next meeting.

Action: WBW/PL to distribute DMG area maps and SAC information dossiers to CNP Board members and new members of CDAG and also to new members in future.

Action: WBW/PL to add conflict resolution process development to next agenda.

4. Sika Deer – further research

The proposal for further research on red/sika hybridisation submitted by Josephine Pemberton was discussed. The aim of the research would be to determine the level of hybridisation occurring on the western boundaries of the park to the west of the Spey by DNA analysis of samples from this area, and by doing so assess the threat to red deer stocks. There is a significant cost attached, and the cost of the full proposal (£8750) was considered too expensive. CNPA could fund or part-fund a reduced research programme.

It was re-emphasised that a priority is to ensure that areas of the park and adjoining land known to be virtually sika-free are kept that way. There are differing levels of tolerance of sika deer by land managers and in some cases they are viewed as an asset. There are areas where sika are present in significant numbers and exist alongside red deer without hybridisation occurring and where they are not seen as a problem. It was agreed that there is a need for clarity regarding the questions which

would be answered as an outcome of further research, and what management action would be possible as a result.

The FCS South Loch Ness area, Glensherro and Glen Mazeran were suggested as priority areas for sampling as these are the locations to the west of the park most likely to harbour hybrids.

An additional need was identified for mapping numbers of sika currently present to inform management decisions. FCS, SNH and Alvie Estate already have information on sika eg cull returns, maps of where sika have been culled, etc, and other agencies and land managers will have similar records. This data needs to be systematically collated. Data on shootings of sika from all estates in the park over the coming season, including date, sex and location, would also be very useful if it could be obtained.

Action: WBW/PL to contact Josephine Pemberton and find out what she could offer in terms of a reduced (but still meaningful) genetic study and collation of sika population and distribution data, for a reduced price.

Action: FCS and SNH to source existing data on sika and pass on to Josephine Pemberton or CDAG as appropriate.

Action: All to galvanise support from estate owners and managers for collecting and submitting information on sika shot during the coming season.

5. Deer Code Consultation

Collating a joint CDAG response to the consultation with input from all members was not attempted because many members are submitting responses on behalf of their own organisations. Instead members were asked for input to CNPA's response. Points were noted from all present.

In summary the responses welcomed the draft code, but there were concerns expressed about an apparently negative representation of deer.

Action: WBW to submit consultation response taking account of comments and circulate to CDAG.

6. Joint Working update

There is need for the impact of the East Drumochter SAC on sporting activities to be discussed by all neighbouring land managers. This group approach has worked well in the Ben Alder area. It was agreed that CDAG could be used as a mechanism to encourage joint working regarding deer between all stakeholders in the three SACs on the west side of the park (E. Drumochter, Cairngorms and Beinn a Ghlo SACs).

Action: MH and CD to arrange a stakeholder meeting on SACs to the west of the park.

7. CDAG membership

Membership has been reviewed as attendance by some has been variable and it is important CDAG continues to represent a broad range of interests.

A wildlife tourism representative has not yet been identified. A number of names were suggested including a representative from the Donside area.

Members of local Community Councils could be invited according to the location of each meeting.

There is a gap for reliable representation from the environmental lobby. LINK need to be approached again to put someone forward.

Action: WBW to approach possible wildlife tourism representatives and other potential new members.

Action: All to send any further suggestions for new members to WBW.

8. AOCB.

Hill Tracks

Concerns were raised over the planning status of hill tracks which is currently under Government review and consultation. A need for planning permission for new tracks was recognised, however the question was raised as to whether planning permission will be required for maintenance of tracks. Members were reassured that CNPA's response to the consultation recommends a simpler approach so that there would be a requirement for a 28 day notification of hill track works throughout the park area and that planning permission would only be needed where there may be a conflict with the aims of the park. A planning application would allow the potential impacts to be examined and permission would be granted or not accordingly. Simple maintenance of existing hill tracks is not likely to require permission, which is the current position under planning regulations. CNPA will take a reasonable, common sense approach and a quick response to notifications would be given. Although it is too late for CDAG to respond directly to the consultation, there will be further opportunity for input on this issue through the new National Park Plan consultation later this year.

9. Date of next meeting

23rd November 2011, tea/coffee 10:30, meeting 11.00.

Venue – Lecht Ski Centre, tbc.

Sincere thanks to Glen Tanar Estate for hosting the meeting and subsequent tour.