

JURA DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

Minute of the meeting of Wednesday 3rd April 2019 held in Jura Village Hall.

Present: John Lithgow (Chairperson) - Inver Estate, Donald Ewen Darroch (Secretary) - Inver Estate, Ross Rozga - Forest Estate, Kate Johnson - Barnhill Estate, Guy Morlock - Tarbert Estate, William MacDonald - Ardfin Estate, Ewan MacInnes - Ardlussa Estate, Andrew Fletcher - Ardlussa Estate, Craig Rozga - Ruantallain Estate, Scott Muir - Ruantallain Estate.

Welcome: The chair welcomed everyone to the inaugural meeting of the constituted group. He noted that it did not seem a year since the group had sat down with SNH to discuss the need for a formalisation of the island-based group.

Apologies: Gordon Muir - Tarbert Estate, Jamie Fletcher – Barnhill Estate, Andrew Kent of SNH who could not attend as there were no ferries.

Approval of Constitution:

Proposed constitution was adopted.

Draft Deer Management Plan Information Paper:

It was agreed by all that Linzi had put a considerable amount of work into the plan which clearly showed the importance of deer to the Island of Jura historically, today, and going forward. The report has drawn together a lot of interesting data. A general discussion was held on the report overall with further comments to be forwarded to the secretary. It is felt that all wording in the plan should be flexible. The members do not wish to be constrained by limitations on how individual estates operate their businesses or on how the group operates. Confirm with SNH what is expected in the form of consultation and over what period. At this time the present comments were made:

Section 6.2 Membership and stakeholders. Confirmation to be sought from SNH about who they expected to be involved in decision making.

Section 6.3. Culls. See below for comments on Section 2.8.

Counts. Goats must be included in counts.

Calving counts. Summer counts not relevant. Delete.

Section 8 & 9. Woodlands. It should be noted from experience that the best method of protection on Jura is by fencing.

Section 12.3. Feral Goats. Clarification to be sought from SNH about the word feral in a Jura context. Also, clarification on what the SNH management policy refers to.

Section 15.3. Actions for Delivery. Why are the group liaising – working with the Mountain Bothy Association? It was questioned how this is relevant to the plan?

Deer Management Plan Group Operation Paper:

As above further comments to be forwarded to the secretary. At this time the present comments were made:

Section 2.8. Culling. Individual cull aims will have to be flexible. No estate is agreeing to an exact cull figure for a forward year. Concentration on definitive cull figures is seen as detracting from overall land management. Deer are a wild resource with many uncontrollable factors which can require adjustments to the ongoing cull. Population levels will determine suggested culls on an annual basis.

Section 2.9. Summer calving counts. Consensus that this is not relevant.

Section 2.12.1. Stag to hind ratio. The group do not support a 1 to 1 ratio. Delete.

Section 2.12.4. Goats. As above section 12.3.

Section 2.13 (?) SQWV is not suitable or beneficial to several members. Individual estates will join if they so desire.

Estate Reports:

- a. Deer Counts. South Jura was counted on 27th and 28th March. Tarbert and Forest were both down in numbers but Inver and Ardfin were up. Overall the count was only down 40 animals. Total 2521. Of which stags 840, hinds 1295, calves 386. The calving percentage was low at 29.8%. North Jura hope to count this week if weather conditions suit.
- b. Winter Mortalities. Counts are better done in a month or so but at present there is no indication of many natural deaths.
- c. Proposed culls. Estates will decide after all counts are complete. It is felt historical (last year) data is more useful for the group as it can be related to actual population levels. Due to the change in distribution of deer Ardfin Estate may increase its cull. It is noted that this could affect neighbouring estates. There is still an underlying worry within the group that external agencies are going to be pushing for increased culls.
- d. DVCs. The members are aware of 5 south of Craighouse and 1 north of Craighouse.
- e. Out of season authorisations. None.

Habitat Monitoring:

It was felt that the habitat training undertaken in May 2018 with the Farm Advisory Service, whilst interesting had not been helpful overall. Some of the training seemed to be contradictory. Some members felt the brief training does not provide the experience/knowledge to complete these surveys to an acceptable level as required by agencies. That perhaps reflects why none have been completed to date. Some estates feel that these should be done inhouse whilst others are of the opinion, they would rather use an outside party or do it jointly with an experienced or independent party. Some comments were: This is going to take a considerable amount of time/labour, can it be done over a period of time, can the estates decide the plots to be checked or is it only SNH who will randomly identify the areas, are the habitat types actually specified, relevant to or available on Jura.

The group acknowledge the relevance of the surveys going forward but these are new to the group and further advice is required.

Matters agreed. Each estate shall be responsible for ensuring the surveys are done in an acceptable manner by the methods most suited to their business. SNH must be consulted for advice on how this can be progressed further and at speed.

Training:

All estates have personnel who have DCS level 1. During the course of the oncoming season some estates will have clients who can act as witness for the level 2 qualification. To be discussed further by those interested.

DMG Website:

A domain has been purchased. The chair will set up the web page. He asked members for relevant photos. It was also suggested that estate stalking dates could be put on the site for the information of walkers.

SNH DMG Assessment 2019:

The Chair and Secretary to have a meeting with James Hammond of SNH on the 17th April.

SNH Update:

Due to there being no ferry no one could be present from SNH.

Finance & Division of Costs:

The allocation percentages as per the Constitution were agreed for the overall group.

Cost allocation for the Craighouse chill will be specific to those who use the facility.

As it is anticipated there will be little ongoing cost it was agreed there was no need for a group bank account. Inver Estate will pay invoices and get reimbursement from the other members.

Any Other Business:

Association of Deer Management Groups. Agreed there is no benefit in Jura being a member.

Craighouse Chill. Some minor repairs are required. These will be undertaken by the parties involved. The long-term future of the existing chill unit to be discussed at another meeting.

Venison Sales. Due to the reduction in Game Dealers and the costs of uplifting from the island it is as yet unclear how many parties will be interested in bidding for the Jura production this season.

Carcass damage. It was commented on that some estates are noticing Sea Eagle damage before the carcasses can be uplifted. In particular Barnhill and Inver. (Birds are seen leaving the damaged carcass).

Cromies. It was suggested that if available a DNA investigation should be undertaken. To be confirmed if possible.

Access. Some estates have had issues with gates being left open or even taken off the hinges.

Police Scotland. Confirm dates for a discussion on wildlife crime, firearms legislation and access issues.

Poster. The secretary to investigate if the private leaflet (recently circulated) on livestock, dogs and other issues could be adapted by the group.

Date of Next Meeting:

Possibly after the stag season but to be agreed nearer the time.

The Chair thanked members for attending and closed the meeting.