

JURA DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

Minute of the meeting of Monday 13th May 2024 in Tarbert Lodge.

Present: John Lithgow (Chairperson) - Inver Estate, Graham Hayes-Inver Estate, Josh Henderson -Inver Estate, Lord Astor-Tarbert Estate, Gordon Muir – Tarbert Estate, Scott Muir-Tarbert Estate, Kyle MacDonald – Tarbert Estate, William MacDonald - Ardfin Estate, Andrew Fletcher - Ardlussa Estate, Ewan MacInnes - Ardlussa Estate, Rowan Latimer- Ardlussa Estate, Craig Rozga - Ruantallain Estate, Ross Rozga - Forest Estate, Donald Ewen Darroch (Secretary), Nathan Berrie of NatureScot, Barry Dunne (head of peatland operations NatureScot), Angharad Ward (local peatland officer). Andrew McCallum – Wild Jura Ltd, By video link, Cllr Redman, and Cllr McFadzean.

Welcome: The chair welcomed everyone.

Apologies: Lindsay Bury -Ruantallain Estate, Jamie & Rob Fletcher – Barnhill Estate, Mark McKinley- Ardfin Estate, Guy Morlock- Ruantallain Estate.

Minutes of 21st November 2023:

These had been circulated previously by email and were deemed as accepted.

Nature Scot and Government Policy Update:

The Chair agreed that to allow NatureScot/ACT staff to return to Islay this section be brought forward in the agenda.

Nathan Berrie (NatureScot) informed those present that the general trend was for management plans which showed the set aim to reduce deer densities. This is to help with improvements in diversity and environmental habitats. Improvements to peat land, wet land habitats and carbon reduction are all part of the mix. NatureScot and St Andrews University are working on a new population modelling tool which will use Jura as a case study. The benefits of aiming for a 1:1 stag:hind ratio was outlined by Nathan Berrie and was supported by Lord Astor. It was reported that this did not impact on availability of stags for stalking clients but that the increased competition for hinds improved the herd overall. Nathan will keep the group informed regarding the population modelling study. Overall NatureScot will assist where possible with management plans.

Barry Dunne advised that himself and his colleagues had spent the day looking at peatland areas on two estates. The standard of peat and wet land was better than he expected and better than the Caledonian Climate desk top study document had indicated. (This is in line with studies undertaken privately by some estates). There were small areas where improvements could be made. Further investigation would be needed. Financial incentives such as the Peatland Action and Nature Restoration Fund are reducing their intake. Any approaches for such funding may have to be done on a collaborative action over the island. As commented previously they are happy to help when and where appropriate.

In general discussion it was reiterated that Jura does not have a peatland/wetland issue in the same manner as many mainland estates have. For the small areas of restoration involved would any work be financially justified. Due to the low level of degradation on Jura there was little prospect of outside investment as in carbon credits etc. If deer numbers were significantly reduced, would it actually make any difference to the peatland areas.

Each estate is different so it may be difficult to achieve a justifiable island wide project. It would appear that any form of subsidy, public financial assistance is going to be tied to deer numbers in the future.

The Chair noted that there are many areas of Scotland which are not covered by Deer Management Groups and wondered how deer numbers in these areas were being controlled. The Jura estates had formed a formal management group in good faith and he hoped this was not going to become a burden to all involved.

Deer Management Plan Information Paper:

Due to be updated where required. Population monitoring to be considered. As Linzi Seivwright has the data sets for the original documents check if she is willing to undertake the update plus an indication of expected costs.

Deer Management Plan Group Operation Paper:

To be updated as per the Information paper.

Estate Reports:

- a. Deer Count. A full island count was undertaken over five days. The weather was good over the period. It is noted that there may have been a possibility of double counting during the Ruantallain count. Stags 2071, Hinds 2676, Calves 1119. The total of 5866 is 223 higher than last year. The chair noted that the trend over the last few counts has been for numbers to be slightly climbing.
- b. Proposed annual cull. Several estates are aiming to slightly increase the cull, especially of hinds.
- c. Observed deer health. The general comment was that the herd had kept their condition over the winter despite the wet weather. During the count animals looked strong. Animals with pin teeth appear to be on the increase. Still unknown why. It was also commented about animals appearing to eat bracken root during the winter/spring.
- d. Deer Vehicle Collisions. Three reported since the last meeting. Cllr McFadzean to ask the Council if 'deer warning' signs could be placed at set points on the public road.
- e. Out of season authorisations. None.

Habitat Monitoring:

No plots surveyed this year. Nathan Berrie advised that a new grassland methodology has been developed for habitat monitoring. This should be more applicable to many areas of Jura. NatureScot are also working on a new woodland version. He proposed that it may be possible to come in April/May next year to aid in training whilst doing the identified plots. NatureScot do expect these surveys to be done as part of the long-term management plan.

Training:

There is interest in an ATV and chain saw course for estate personnel. The possibilities to be researched by interested estates.

DMG Website:

To be updated as required. Inver Estate continue to cover the ongoing cost but this needs to be reviewed.

Game Dealers and venison sales:

Highland Game who has been the major purchasers of venison on Jura, over the last few years have said that they see little opportunity for an increase in price currently. Whilst there is an increase in venison uptake by consumers in the UK, overheads remain high. Especially so for island collections. A pilot scheme is under way in the Cairngorms National Parks assessing the impact of a possible venison subsidy. Public funding to aid the expansion of local processing units is also under review.

Andy McCallum said that he hoped their venison processing unit in Keils would be operating later this year using the Wild Jura Venison label. They are also looking at supplying local schools.

Lead free ammunition:

The Chair asked how the stalkers present had found the copper (non-lead) ammunition. The general comment was that it is not as efficient in killing, there are more incidents of ricocheting rounds and at times a lot of internal carcass damage. It is understood that there are suggestions that copper only rounds be used by professional stalkers with lead to be still used by inexperienced shooters.

Finance & Division of Costs:

Inver Estate has been covering associated costs but feel that additional costs should be shared. Agreed that expenses incurred in updating the future Management Plan should be shared equally.

Any Other Business:

Rabbits. It was noted that the island seems to have a rabbit boom at present.

Heather Beetle. There appeared to be an increase this year, predominantly in the north of the island with a lot of heather lost in some areas.

Date of Next Meeting:

Date to be agreed for November 2024.

The Chair thanked members for attending and closed the meeting.