

JURA DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

Minute of the meeting of Monday 4th November 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, William MacDonald - Ardfin Estate, Ewan MacInnes - Ardlussa Estate, Andrew Fletcher - Ardlussa Estate, Craig Rozga - Ruantallain Estate, Gordon Muir – Tarbert Estate, Andrew Kent - SNH

Welcome: The chair welcomed everyone.

Apologies: Jamie Fletcher – Barnhill Estate, Rob Fletcher – Barnhill Estate, Scott Muir – Ruantallain Estate, Police Scotland and Jamie Hammond – SNH.

Deer Management Plan Information Paper:

The plan is complete. No need to update at this time.

Deer Management Plan Group Operation Paper:

The secretary confirmed that stakeholders are kept informed of minutes and meeting dates. No updates needed to the operation paper.

Deer Management Group Working Plan

The secretary will need some larder data to update the working plan before the next meeting. Data to be supplied at the end of the season. Any other relevant sections to be updated on an ongoing basis by the secretary with information supplied by the individual estates.

Estate Reports:

- a. Deer Counts. All Jura count showed a total of 4912 animals which was down 192. Recruitment was low for Jura at 30%. Total stags 1729, hinds 2,445, calves 738.
- b. Winter Mortalities. Known mortality in the period ending May 2019 was 32.
- c. Proposed culls. Total island cull for the 18/19 season was 713. Which was made up off, Stags 265, hinds 335, calves 113. The stag cull for the 2019 season was 283. Up slightly which is in line with Inver and Ardfin increasing cull numbers. Most estates will be taking a hind cull similar to last year, dependent on animal condition and weather. Ardfin and Inver intend to have a slight increase.
- d. DVCs. None known in this period
- e. Out of season authorisations. None.

Habitat Monitoring:

Further training had been undertaken with Linzi Seivwright in the spring.

Inver and Barnhill have surveyed a large number of their allocated plots. A summary of the results has been undertaken by Linzi. (Copies transmitted to members) Overall the herbivore browsing impacts on Dwarf Shrub Heath and Blanket Bog were low. Trampling impacts were in the main low to medium.

Of the 56 plots surveyed, approximately 30% were found not to correspond to the habitat type predicted. The group feel this needs to be noted by SNH, with consideration given to a more suitable habitat type identified for Jura.

Some estates commented that this is going to take a considerable amount of time/labour and they can see no managerial benefit in undertaking the surveys. Others felt that the group had agreed to move forward with a recognised plan and if habitat surveys were an expected part of that process then they should be undertaken. Some felt that the data requested does not seem to be relevant to

other land management issues. There was a suggestion that a random 10% survey of the plotted areas could be a solution. The chair asked how justifiable these surveys are. Await suggestions and comment from SNH going forward.

Training:

A chain saw course may be held early 2020.

DMG Website:

General comment was that the page looks very good with lots of information. When a search engine is used, it is often the ADMG page which comes up. As Jura are not part of this group the SNH representative agreed to liaise with ADMG and ask that the reference to Jura is removed from their website as the Group have not involved ADMG.

SNH DMG Assessment 2019:

The Chair and Secretary met with James Hammond and Andrew Kent of SNH on the 17th April. The group assessment appeared to be positive.

SNH Update:

- SNH recognises the fantastic work that the Group have put in to the DMG Process and the Group is one of the best performing. Our thanks for all your efforts in pulling this work together. This achievement is even greater given that the Group have had less time than others working on the DMG process. The Group's achievements have been shared by both Jamie and me with other parts of the organisation as an example to others.
- The Group's website is very informative and is one of the best examples of a DMG website. Again, our thanks for all the hard work that has gone in to this including video and imagery. Internally others in the organisation have commented on the quality of the website and the information that it provides.
- The Assessing Progress of Deer Management Report has been submitted to Scottish Government. This Report includes the assessment of Deer Management Group (DMG) performance in 2019 carried out by SNH in conjunction with the Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG).
- We are not sure when Scottish Government will publish the report, they have to respond formally however have said that they will publish the Report in the interim period. The forthcoming election has resulted in further delay however we recognise that everyone wants to see it and have been putting pressure on Scottish Government to publish and will continue to do so.
- The Report recognises the good progress made since 2016 and in terms of Jura, the Group is way ahead of other DMGs, both Jamie and I were keen for that to be recognised in Group minutes.
- In the uplands, DMGs now cover a greater proportion of the red deer range, with significantly improved management plans and associated improvements in DMG performance.

- Based on the evidence presented by DMGs in the 2019 assessments, there has been a statistically significant improvement in DMG performance across the Benchmark criteria.
- All categories with the exception of one (Category 11 – Data and Evidence Gathering Habitat Monitoring) scored above 80% green. This is not unexpected given that Habitat Monitoring has been a new ask for the majority of Groups.
- Deer Working Group – Ministers appointed an independent working group in October 2017. The role of the group is to examine the current issues over standards of deer management in Scotland and recommend changes to ensure public interests are safeguarded and the sustainable management of wild deer promoted. The scope includes all deer species and upland and lowland circumstances. The group was expected to report in November 2019, and their report will be considered in parallel with the SNH report. Whilst there has been regular liaison with SNH in gathering information to inform the DWG's report and to keep us updated on their progress, we have not attempted to pre-empt their findings and hence do not speculate on recommendations likely to arise from the DWG report in this report.

At this point Andrew Kent had to leave to catch the ferry to Islay.

Finance & Division of Costs:

All outstanding amounts have been paid to date. Ruantallain Estate indicated that they were unhappy about the costs incurred and division of such. They do not wish to contribute further. Any amounts due to be reviewed at the next meeting.

Any Other Business:

Access. It is felt that more people are telephoning to ask if they can go walking during stalking time. Generally, walkers are polite and courteous but the increasing numbers going to the Paps is affecting Inver and Forest's stalking ability.

Pin Teeth. Inver has noticed an increase in the numbers showing this trait which could be an indication of animals moving south. Generally, there is a high incidence in Tarbert and Ruantallain. Cause unknown.

Bracken. Deer digging up bracken has become more noticeable on Inver. This had been noticed in Tarbert some time ago. Again, deer moving south? Reasons unknown.

Heather. Comments made about the loss of heather to beetle and perhaps the extended dry weather in the spring. It was questioned why we are spending time doing needless habitat surveys which do not make reference to the loss of heather to beetle, which many feel is more significant.

Date of Next Meeting:

April 2020. Exact date to be agreed after the New Year.

The Chair thanked members for attending and closed the meeting.