

CAIRNGORMS DEER ADVISORY GROUP

Minutes of meeting held on

Wednesday 7th March 2012

at

CNPA Offices, Grantown on Spey.

Present

Michael Hone (Chair), Will Boyd-Wallis, Ewan Cameron, Alasdair Colquhoun, Willie Lamont, Jamie Williamson, Katrina Farquhar, Althea Davies (James Hutton Institute), Gina Maffey (Aberdeen University), Mike Cottam, Penny Lawson (minutes).

1. Welcome and apologies.

Apologies received from:

Simon Blackett, Dick Balharry, John Bruce, Roger Clegg, Patrick Thompson, Justin Irvine, Pete Mayhew, Colin McClean, Duncan Or Ewing, Colin Shedden, Gordon Riddler, Caroline Warburton, David Frew.

2. Minutes of last meeting – 23rd November 2011

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

3. Action points and Matters arising from last meeting

Joint Working

Stakeholder meeting regarding SACs to the west of the Park, being progressed. Jamie Williamson to be invited.

Action: MH to arrange.

Appointment of wildlife tourism representative to group

Caroline Warburton of Wild Scotland has expressed interest in joining CDAG. She was unable to attend this meeting but will be invited to the next one and has been added to the circulation list.

Deer Management Planning – aspirations, counts and habitat assessments

Aspirational deer density mapping was discussed and it was re-iterated that CDAG should encourage uptake of a uniform approach across the whole Park. There is currently some variation in the type of mapping used, e.g. Monadhliaths DMG have mapped their area according to deer management objectives, but the overall advantages of the concise aspirational deer density map based approach were accepted as the best way forward for CDAG to pursue.

CDAG's support for continuation of deer counts every 5 years, as agreed at the November meeting, was confirmed, though the uncertainty regarding the source of funding was acknowledged. Different counting methods were discussed and the need for consistency was emphasised.

Patrick Thomson was not present to report progress on actions from the last meeting.

Road traffic collisions

John Bruce had approached the author of a recent report on the effects of deer management activities on rates of deer collisions, with a view to him presenting to CDAG. There will be a cost involved in taking this further, more information is awaited. SNH have set up a subgroup with the Roads Dept to look at this over a wide area of northern Scotland, which could potentially include the CNP. More information is needed about this in order to assess whether there is a need for a separate survey within the park.

Action: WBW to contact Rory Putnam regarding road collision survey.

Authorisations

MH has had extensive discussions with SNH on consultation with DMGs on authorisations. In essence the message from the Chair of SNH is that there is an onus on all estate owners to compromise and adapt their management to minimise impacts on neighbours whilst in the pursuit of their own objectives.

All other points were covered later in the meeting.

4. Constitution and Chairman

MH circulated a draft constitution for discussion. Comments are invited, especially regarding the office bearers section, with the aim of adopting the constitution at the next meeting.

Action: WBW to circulate draft constitution to all CDAG members and CNPA Board.

Action: KF to seek views of Board members as appropriate.

5. Deer Framework: Monitoring progress

A report detailing progress to Dec 2011 was circulated before the meeting. A point was raised and discussed regarding trainee keepers on placements within the park, ie how many placements are offered, how successful are they and how much are the trainees paid? This could be monitored by CNPA.

Action: WBW/KF to discuss and progress.

6. SNH Code of Practice on Deer Management

The code is now available to download at <http://www.snh.gov.uk/land-and-sea/managing-wildlife/managing-deer/code-of-deer-management/> CDAG members and respective DMG members are encouraged to read it carefully as it contains some significant changes in policy. DMGs are encouraged to report back to CDAG with their views on the code and how it will affect them.

Action: All to encourage regular reference to the Deer Management Code.

7. Habitat Assessment Options

It was agreed at the previous meeting that on-going habitat assessment is important to inform deer management practice. CSDMG put forward the idea that monitoring carried out by suitably trained estate workers rather than external agencies would have certain advantages, eg encourage 'ownership' of the monitoring programme, use local knowledge, and provide a cost effective way to implement monitoring. In response to this, a paper by Ian Hope, SNH, was circulated; 'Developing Skills in the Assessment of Herbivore Impacts on Heather Habitats', including an estimate of overall cost for the work. The proposal focuses solely on heather habitats and covers browsing by all herbivores, not just deer. The training element of the paper would ensure that those directly involved in deer management are able to monitor heather habitat status in accordance with accepted best practice. Funding for the training is available from SNH and from CNPA through the Land Management Training Project. Data collected through the proposed monitoring could be assessed against comparable baseline data from 1995-2000 published by SNH (<http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=1408>)

The issue was discussed with varying opinions expressed, including:

- Interpretation of data and assessment of the condition of the habitat depends on the desired land management objective, so any particular method will only be relevant in certain areas.
- Monitoring by trained keepers may have limitations due to) lack of time, b) lack of commitment/interest/capability, c) low level of objectivity
- An easy to use survey method using a mobile phone application is being developed linked to Gina Maffey's PhD work
- Information from monitoring could be very useful in showing that deer management in the Park is working well
- An alternative would be for the monitoring to be done across the Park by an external organisation, similar to the methods used in the SNH report referenced above.
- CDAG support should be in relation to the effect of habitat condition on health of deer – the health of the deer and habitat are interdependent and need to be assessed together

Thanks were extended to Ian Hope for producing the proposal.

Action: WBW to pass on CDAG advice to Iain Hope and consider further.

8. Stalking signage

Work on a template sign to raise awareness of deer stalking in popular walking areas has progressed and an example of the latest draft was circulated. A good level of interest was expressed at the ADMG AGM. The standard template will include CNP branding and will have options for personalisation for each estate. The signs will be offered to land managers across the park in the near future.

9. Mar Lodge Estate review

Developments were broadly welcomed by CDAG. A positive response to the Review from local communities was reported via the Community Councils. Some concerns were expressed about the likelihood of success of the proposed strategic fence-line.

10. ADMG AGM feedback

Agreement on increased subscription rates had been reached. The economics of venison production and marketing were discussed. Mike Cottam presented the aspirational deer density maps produced by CNPA following development by the CSDMG subgroup and consultation with the East Grampian DMG.

11. Sika research update

In total 8 estates west of the Spey are involved in sample collection for the hybridisation research, which is progressing. It was noted that the Deer Code encourages preservation of existing sika-free areas.

12. AOCB

FC Deer density maps

These are available and can be presented at the next meeting.

Action: WBW, WL and Mike Cottam to liaise.

13. Date of next meetings

TBC