

Draft Note of Meeting (18 December 2018)

Date: Friday 14 December 2018
Time: 6:00 – 8:45 pm
Location: Cally Hall, Bridge of Cally
Subject: 2018 SNH Caenlochan Survey Project: Update & Report
Present: Drew McFarlane-Slack (Monadhliath DMG)
Mike Cottam (CNPA)
Angus McNicol, Liam Donald & Will Reid (Invercauld)
Bill Mearns (Tulchan)
Deirdre Stewart (EGDMG1)
Bruce Cooper, Eric Starke & Finlay Girdwood (Glenprosen)
Rob Mearns (Balintore & Lednathie)
Brian Smith (Airlie West)
Thom Wells (Glen Clova)
Chris Walker (Balmoral)
James Davidson (Forter/Alrick)
Kevin Peters (FES Glendoll)
Graham Slater (Auchavan)
Jason Williamson (Glencally)
John Gibb & Nick Gibb (Glenisla House)
Thomas Rust & Mark Mitchell (Bell Ingram, for Scottish Water)
Douglas Campbell & Mel Marchbank (SCL)
Denise Reed (Chair), Neale Taylor & Iain Hope (SNH)
Apologies: Richard Gledson & Gary Coutts (Balmoral)
Jamie Gammell (Forter/Alrick)
Florian Kuhnle (Tulchan)
Andrew Gammell (Auchavan)
Colin McLean (ADMG)
Rory Stormonth-Darling & Julian Clarke (WGDMG)

1 Introduction & Purpose

The main purpose of this meeting, the second in a series of 3, was to report on (& discuss) information on habitats & herbivore impacts (including that obtained during 2018 habitat surveys at Caenlochan by Strath Caulaidh) and to encourage thinking and discussion on the associated implications for deer management.

The meeting also provided an opportunity to review progress in achieving the 2018/2019 hind cull.

Denise Reed (Chair & SNH) reflected on the 20 November meeting and explained that SNH was taking care to avoid a 'single focus' (e.g. on the designated sites) and that SNH aims to reach consensus with stakeholders; to achieve the best possible outcomes: for people and for deer. SNH has no wish to rely on the use of 'heavy' regulation and would much prefer to assist in a voluntary process; by providing support, guidance & leadership.

2 Note of Meeting on 20 November 2018

A draft note of the meeting on 20 November had been circulated. It was noted that the actions from the meeting on 20 November were either 'in hand' or had been discharged. There being no substantive comments on the note of the meeting, the note was taken to be approved.

3 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising; other than those to be addressed under the agenda.

4 2018 SNH Survey Project: Update & Report from SCL

Dougie Campbell (SCL) gave a presentation, on a part of the SCL work, which included detailed analysis of data obtained from habitat surveys carried out by SCL (on behalf of SNH) at Caenlochan during 2018. The presentation also included reference to previous herbivore impact assessments at Caenlochan by SNH.

The 2018 survey found that herbivore impacts (mainly arising from deer occupancy on the site, but also undoubtedly from sheep and hare locally) are currently relatively (very) high. It is suggested that, to deliver Scottish Government policies, a 'step-change' in approach is required to guarantee delivery.

Having summarised the habitat survey information (& the implications for deer management), Dougie offered some proposals for a way forward that would allow for an open & accountable process to develop meaningful & integrated plans for management. The proposal related to an approach that would be inclusive, informed, integrated & innovative.

In the interim (while an improved planning framework is being established), it was recommended that land managers continue to:

1. Implement an effective cull of hinds
2. Work collaboratively (by communicating, willingness & open-mindedness)
3. Digest the findings of SCL's work (& asking questions if clarification is needed!)

A copy of Dougie's presentation is to be made available at an early opportunity, preferably before Christmas.

After a short break (for tea & cake!), there was a 'question & answer' session on Dougie's presentation. A summary of the questions & answers is presented at Annex 1 below.

The question & answer session was characterised by an informed, constructive & courteous exchange.

Action 1:	Dougie Campbell (SCL) to provide a copy of his presentation, to Deirdre Stewart & Mike Cottam; for forwarding to DMG members.
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Action 2:	Dougie Campbell to provide a copy the SCL cull allocation (3x zones & 2x scenarios) & updated cull figures, to Deirdre Stewart & Mike Cottam; for forwarding on to DMG members.
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5 2018/2019 Hind Culls

Hind culls to date were reported. In the wider area, 1,161 hinds had been killed to date (since 1 September 2018). For the properties in the Control Area, the total number of hinds cull to date (in 2018) is 965.

It was noted that the size of the hind cull is at least equal to the largest since involvement by DCS staff (& helicopters!) in 2005/2006 & 2006/2007 – and there are still over 3 months available (under authorisation from 15 February to 31 March) for culling hinds in 2018/2019. It was acknowledged that the number of hinds culled was remarkable and represented a huge amount of hard work. That said, it was emphasised that many more hinds have yet to be culled to reach the 'McClean' advisory cull target (1,900 hinds from the control area in 2018/2019).

Hind cull progress to date represents about 50% of the 1,900 target and, for comparison, represents about 40% of a (second) scenario presented by SCL; a cull of 2,500 hinds.

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Following on from discussion on the numbers of hinds culled to date, time was spent thinking ahead to the next meeting, on 18 January 2019.

Key points discussed included the following:

- The work by SCL in 2018 has provided a large & very useful dataset
- There is clear progress with hind culls & an obvious intention to continue with culls so as to deliver a meaningful reduction
- It's highly desirable to develop a shared, long term vision (for integrated land management)
- Such a vision could be used to prepare a multi-benefit strategic management plan
- Detailed & specific actions could, in turn, be derived from the strategic planning process
- The wider discussion group (i.e. all those present at this meeting) had proved to be very useful for sharing information, raising awareness & identifying key issues
- A smaller 'task & finish' group, with executive powers, is required; to make progress rapidly & efficiently
- Effective leadership, and an independent chair for the smaller group, is called for
- A detailed proposal (for an improved management planning process) should be prepared for discussion, & decision, at the meeting in January 2019. At the meeting in January, decisions should be made on, for example, proposed group membership and proposed finances.
- It's anticipated that the report of the SCL work (carried out in 2018) will be available by late April 2019
- It's anticipated that satisfactory progress will have been made by mid-2019, thereby enabling SNH to report positively, on Caenlochan, to the Scottish Government ECCLR Committee

Action 3:	Iain Hope (SNH) to refresh the agenda for the 18 January 2019 meeting; and circulate the revised version of the agenda with the draft note of this meeting.
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Action 4:	Dougie Campbell (SCL) to prepare a briefing note, for the meeting on 18 January 2019; to be sent to Deirdre Stewart & Mike Cottam, for forwarding on to DMG members.
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Action 5:	If necessary, Iain Hope (SNH) to carry out a fixed-wing 'deer-spotting' flight as or when conditions & aircraft availability allow.
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7 Any Other Business

There was no other business.

Denise Reed thanked everyone for attending and the meeting was closed at about 8:00 pm.

2018 SNH Caenlochan Survey Project: Update & Report

6:00 pm
Friday 18 January 2019
Cally Hall, Bridge of Cally

Agenda

- 1 Apologies**
- 2 Note of Meeting on 14 December 2018**
- 3 Matters Arising**
- 4 2018 SNH Survey Project: Update & Report from SCL**
 - Focus on Main Conclusions, Recommendations & Way Forward
- 5 Proposal for an Improved Deer Management Planning Process**
 - Briefing note to be circulated in advance
 - Task & Finish Work Group; membership & initial work programme
 - Leadership; Independent chair for Work Group
 - Timescales
 - Spatial scales
 - Resources; Possibilities of joint-funding (e.g. by SNH)
- 6 2018/2019 Hind Culls to Date**
- 7 Any Other Business**
- 8 Date of Next Meeting**
 - Work Group to meet regularly & frequently (say monthly for a year?)
 - Wider 'stakeholder' group to meet, say in April or May 2019 (after hind cull and once SCL report is available?)

Invitation List:

All members of EGDMG1
All members of SDNADMG

Annex 1 Summary of Question (or comments) & Answer Session

- Q1. To a certain extent, the results of the 2018 survey are no surprise; what would be an appropriate spatial scale over which to deliver effective management?
- A1. The appropriate spatial scale is open to discussion & debate; an effective deer management planning process would be expected to explore the issue (of spatial scale) and provide a satisfactory resolution.
- Q2. The occupancy by deer is relatively very high in summer and in winter: is it fair to say that most 'damage' by deer is caused in winter?
- A2. Yes; for 'woody' plants (e.g. dwarf shrub heath). Most of the offtake of heather shoots by deer occurs in the period October to May. In an ideal world, the 2018 survey would've included a bigger area (more 'low' ground) and would've covered a longer period of time (summer & winter). The data obtained from the systematic grid of plots established in 2018 allows for a sensitive measure of habitat change, both spatially and temporally, in future.
- Q3. The trends for true grasses seem to be a bit more puzzling?
- A3. Yes; the trends in grasses showed no obvious patterns, at least at this early stage of data analysis. That said, deer are clearly utilising grasses across the site and grasses respond differently to browsing (compared with the woody plants).
- Q4. Can the deer dung count method differentiate between the sex and age of animals?
- A4. Attempts were made to attribute pellet groups into stags, hinds and calves on site but it is inherently error prone and not a data set to rely on (compared with the total count, which is very reliable). That said, the history & experience of using deer dung counts to estimate levels of utilisation & population size is well tested by SCL and reasonably reliable.
- Q5. The range for deer at Caenlochan is relatively fertile & productive; presumably it is therefore capable of carrying relatively high levels of stock?
- A5. Several matters must be considered when deriving appropriate stocking levels, including the 'carrying-capacity' and socio-economics. It's suggested that appropriate levels of stocking (or utilisation by deer) could be developed through a balanced and fair process of negotiation & compromise; aimed at achieving mutually satisfactory resolutions & conclusions.
- Q6. Is it appropriate to establish a target deer population by 'working back the way' from the desired number of 'sporting' stags to be culled annually?
- A6. It is possible to model the population, to arrive at the number of deer required to satisfy a given set of requirements (including sporting stag culls). That said, a process of negotiation & compromise is needed to agree the size of population that would be appropriate at Caenlochan (& the timescales associated with achieving that population).
- Q7. Is there a (lower) deer population 'threshold', below which employment in sport stalking enterprises may suffer?

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- A7. By way of example, reference was made to the Monadhliath DMG, where significant reductions in hind numbers had been achieved through deliberate (& voluntary!) reduction culls – but there had been no subsequent loss of employment.
- Q8. The proposed way forward is expected to be 'better for people and better for deer'; which people will benefit?
- A8. The question about who will benefit is open to debate and arguably not presently resolvable. It was suggested that it is not currently possible to say with confidence exactly who or how any given individual will stand to gain or lose (from a reduced deer population). A meaningful planning process would be the best way to resolve the matter.
- Q9. Would it be helpful to record the location (i.e. grid references) of all deer killed in the area?
- A9. It may be useful to have data on the location in which deer are killed; it'll be a matter for land managers & the planning process to determine what deer management activities are most needed.
- Q10. Mountain hares are numerous on my property and I'm planning to cull some of them, to keep hare population size at a reasonable level. Can I have SNH support for a cull of mountain hares?
- A10. Issues around mountain hare populations, especially culls, are topical, political & sensitive. It's currently too early for SNH to offer any support for hare culls but SCL's analysis of the survey data will help identify if there is a need.
- Q11. Just to confirm, did the 2018 deer population assessment estimate the deer density to be around 50 deer/km² at Caenlochan?
- A11. Yes, broadly speaking. The overall average density is ~30 deer/km² - but the summer (& winter) range densities are in the region of 50 – 55 deer/km².
- Q12. The habitat targets in the Control Agreement require 90% to be Low or Moderate/Low; that's quite challenging!
- A12. Yes, the habitat targets (for qualifying habitats on the designated site) in the Agreement are stringent and it's probably impossible to meet those targets (at least for all habitats simultaneously). It's suggested that it'd be far better to make 'everywhere better' rather than the 'designated site perfect'!
- Q13. How could the habitat targets in the Control Agreement be improved on?
- A13. It's suggested that, for example, aiming for an overall population of 10 deer/km² would help improve the condition of habitats – over an area larger than the designated site. It's recommended that land managers could usefully engage in a voluntary & meaningful planning process (on a voluntary, rather than regulatory, basis) to discuss, debate & agree appropriate targets.
- Q14. Each property is different and has its own set of circumstances; how can those individual circumstances be taken fully into account?
- A14. A meaningful, balanced and fair management planning process is expected to take account of the various requirements. It's suggested that effective leadership, an independent chair and a robust planning process are essential if private (& public) interests are to be protected.

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Q15. There was a cull taken after the deer count in January 2018; how has that been taken into account in the various deer population models?

A15. The population model by Colin McLean (on behalf of EGDMG1) took the post-count cull into account. Since the January 2018 count, and since the post-count cull, about 50% of the surviving calves became (yearling) hinds – and a cohort of calves were born in summer 2018. The available data is not perfect (e.g. it's not known how many calves were born in 2018 - but the mortality, culls and recruitment are – up to a point - taken into account in the population models.

In addition, there are 'latent' deer (e.g. deer in woodlands, and therefore hidden from view, at the time of visual deer counts) that 'contribute' to the 'observed' population. The number of deer in woodlands is not presently known.

The various assumptions about deer populations may be considered in the context of the risk, or likelihood, of either 'over-culling' or 'under-culling'.

SCL has presented 2 hind cull 'scenarios'; to demonstrate how the 'plusses' & 'minuses' may be balanced.

Q16. Does SNH have any plans for another deer count (either by helicopter or by aeroplane) and are the DMGs planning any deer counts?

A16. SNH has no plans at present for using helicopters to count deer at Caenlochan.

SNH has made provision for using a fixed-wing aircraft to carry out a 'deer-spotting' flight (not a deer count!), to gather information on the whereabouts of the larger groups of hinds, when weather conditions and aircraft availability allow. The purpose of the deer-spotting flights is to determine whether or not some properties are acting as 'sanctuaries' for hinds.

The DMGs may carry out a deer count, on foot, although the data obtained may be limited or perhaps unreliable.

ENDS