

Strathconon Deer Management Plan

Part 2: Group Operation



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2.1 DMG Objectives and Targets

The purpose of the Strathconon Deer Management Group (SDMG) is to manage deer on a collective basis, in accordance with Scottish Government strategy (**Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach, 2008**), the **Code of Practice on Deer Management** (2012), **Wild Deer Best Practice Guidance** and in a manner that integrates different land-use objectives, recognising that compromises over objectives may be required where conflict occurs. The main objectives, targets and actions for the DMG's deer management during the period of this Plan are set out in Part 1 of the plan and summarised in Part 3: The Working Plan.

2.2 Area & Boundaries & Membership

SDMG area covers some **55045 ha** and has **8 main members**.

To date the DMG has maintained active communication and engagement with all DMGs within the South Ross area but in particular with the neighbouring **Glen Strathfarrar DMG** to the south. It is recognised that given the potential of deer movement between these two DMGs, in order to ensure a landscape approach to deer management, these two Groups will require to collaborate much more closely in the future. The group operates under its **own constitution** and is a member of the Association of Deer Management Groups.

For the purposes of the Plan, although each property is treated as a separate reporting unit, the population will be considered as a whole with all estates contributing to cull targets as agreed particularly as many estates share their stag population between up to three or four neighbouring estates. Deer movements are discussed in more detail in Part 1 of the plan.

2.3 Meetings

SDMG has a strong level of participation from all members of the group with a good attendance at meetings and all properties being represented by owners and or stalkers/managers. The DMG holds two principal meeting each year in Spring and Autumn to collate information and to set and agree culls. Individual members of the Group regularly attend meetings of Glen Strathfarrar DMG with the Chair of Glen Strathfarrar also regularly attending SDMG meetings. The Group is also represented at meetings of the wider South Ross Liaison Group which meets annually.

The main business of the **main full DMG meetings** is to carry out an AGM (Spring) and to keep deer matters across the DMG area under review at a landscape level. A detailed review of the previous season is undertaken at a practical, localised level and to review:

- Culls achieved against cull targets set;
- An assessment of current welfare status of population based on key indicators and winter mortality figures;
- Deer numbers, based on latest counts, indirect monitoring as might be carried out by members as well as updates on planned counts for the year;
- Agreement on cull targets for the next year, based upon evidence/information provided by members;
- Any current problems or issues in the Group area. If necessary, issues will be prioritised and a plan of action agreed upon.

The **Agenda and Minutes** of the main meetings will be **published** on the DMG Website.

2.4 DMG Constitution

The Strathconon Deer Management Group (SDMG) is constituted as a stand-alone Deer Management Group (DMG), this being adopted in ???. The Group operates a Membership system, where properties are formal Members and others are encouraged to join/observe. Anybody involved with the management of wild deer within the Group area, will be encouraged to participate in the execution of this Deer Management Plan.

2.5 Deer Management Plan: Update and Review

This Plan provides an agreed framework for a coordinated and co-operative approach to deer management in the area. The actual implementation of the Plan will be decided on an ongoing basis at the Group's Spring and Autumn meetings, with scope for the Membership to adjust and adapt the main Plan to meet changing circumstances. Should Parts 1 or 2 of the plan require updating, a revised, agreed copy will be circulated to all and updated on the DMG's website. A complete review of the Plan will be conducted in 2021.

Members will complete an annual return which will enable progress towards targets to be monitored and where necessary, changes in management actions will be discussed and agreed. As a result, **Part 3 of the Plan: The Working Plan** will be continually reviewed and actions agreed and implemented by DMG members on an annual basis.

2.6 WDNA, Code of Practice on Deer Management & Wild Deer Best Practice Guidance

Group members support and full endorse:

- The long term vision for deer populations and their management as laid out in "[Scotland's Wild Deer - A National Approach](#)".
- [Code of Practice on Deer Management](#)
- [Wild deer Best Practice Guidance](#)

2.7 ADMG Principles of Collaboration

As member of this DMG, we:-

- Acknowledge what we have in common – namely a shared commitment to a sustainable and economically viable Scottish countryside;
- Make a commitment to work together to achieve that;
- Accept that we have a diversity of management objectives and that we respect each other's objectives;
- Undertake to communicate openly with all relevant parties;
- Commit to negotiate and where necessary compromise in order to accommodate the reasonable land management requirements of our neighbours;
- Undertake that where there are areas of disagreement, we will work to resolve these.

Management decisions are generally achieved by consensus however when necessary dispute resolution within the Strathconon DMG is covered under the Group Constitution. All Group members are encouraged to deal with disputes in the first instance with those parties concerned, be they other Group members, external parties or Government Agencies. Failing that, the Chairman of the Group will seek to facilitate an agreement. This may involve the opportunity to air relevant issues at a meeting of the Group. A request to do this should be made in writing at least two weeks prior to any such meeting. Representatives from

ADMG are available to assist with disputes, should it prove impossible to resolve issues within the Group. Should this arise, The Group accepts that the findings of ADMG will be implemented.

2.8 Culling Operations

To maintain or reduce the deer population means that individual culling decisions become proportionately more important, including the accurate reporting of culls. Open discussion of culls will be required at all meetings.

- All SDMG members agree to make sufficient resources available to carry out the culls outlined in this plan, and to make arrangements with immediate neighbours to assist in a culling programme where time or weather have precluded the target cull in being achieved.
- If extra resources are required for any reason, then further resources should be sought from other SDMG members.

2.9 Data & Evidence Gathering: Deer Count Protocols

It has been agreed that where possible, the DMG will continue to count deer by helicopter every 3 years. The SNH helicopter count across the whole South Ross area spring 2016 forms the baseline for this Plan. A repeat helicopter count is planned for 2019 for the whole South Ross area.

In addition, all Group members are encouraged to undertake a sample recruitment count, every year in the spring around March/beginning of April. This will allow more accurate population monitoring. An indication of winter mortality will be provided for each management unit along with the cull returns for the spring meeting of the Group.

2.10 Data & Evidence Gathering: Cull and Larder Information

Members will complete an annual return, which will include cull data and some larder data for the purposes of monitoring stag age structure and deer welfare.

2.11 Data & Evidence Gathering: Habitat Monitoring Protocols

2.11.1 Background

A key element of a demonstrably effective and environmentally responsible management plan is that it should highlight habitats relevant to deer management, set out clear objectives for those habitats, carry out monitoring and detail the actions and reporting to be implemented to achieve the targets set.

The environmental objectives of the Plan will be linked to Scottish Government policy but the DMG will be expected to manage localised deer impacts to deliver and sustain good condition of a range of designated and non-designated habitats.

2.11.2 Habitat Objectives for the DMG

Within the DMG area, there are three main environmental objectives:

- To deliver favourable or recovering condition on designated sites;
- To manage existing and new native woodland and to improve woodland condition where this is being impacted by deer;
- To manage impacts in the wider non-designated area such as peatland which along with woodland contributes to Scotland's ability to store carbon, and habitats which support a range of species, many of which are unique to the DMG area. In particular the DMG will focus monitoring on dwarf shrub heath and blanket bog habitats

In addition to delivering the cull plan as set out in this document, those properties which do not currently have monitoring in place have agreed in principle to undertake habitat impact assessments, particularly in those areas where there are designated sites.

Habitat Impact Assessment will be conducted so as to:

- Collect and interpret habitat data on a regular basis to inform deer management;
- Set up a baseline to allow changes in impacts to be measured over time;
- Understand the methods used by government agencies.

A further aim will be to map habitat types across estates, particularly with a view to establishing areas of high carbon-sensitive habitats across the DMG range. All estates should establish areas within their boundaries where there is scope for habitat improvement particularly in relation to peatland improvement work.

2.11.3 Wild Deer Best Practice Guidance & Monitoring data sheets

The Wild Deer Best Practice Guides (<http://www.snh.gov.uk/land-and-sea/managing-wildlife/managing-deer/best-practice>) describe the methods used by SNH to monitor deer impacts. These methods are also a key part of how other agencies monitor deer impacts. The proposed method would involve using Best Practice Guidance Habitat Impact Assessment for Dwarf Shrub Heath (DSH) and Blanket Bog (BB)

Each property/management unit would be required to do a minimum of 30 plots (with the proportion of DSH/BB plots relative to the proportion of habitat present). This would be repeated every 3 years. Following on from this individual Group Members may be in a position to apply for Moorland Management Agri-Environment Climate Scheme or Peatland Restoration schemes.

For those with native woodland, the SNH methodology for the Monitoring of Native Woodland on Designated Sites will be used. The numbers of plots per landholding would likely be a minimum of 30 (depending on the size of area of woodland). This would also be repeated every three years. Following on from this, Members could then seek to apply for one of the Forestry Grant Scheme options.

Subject to funding, a formal Strategic Review of woodland expansion according to the Scottish Government Forest Strategy will also be undertaken to identify opportunities for further woodland expansion (which may be eligible for funding through the Woodland Creation option of the Forestry Grant Scheme).

2.11.4 Plot Locations

There are two possible options for the location of plots on a property:

- 1) For those already conducting HIA on their own property, then continuation of use of those plots would be advised.
- 2) For those wishing to start monitoring and create a baseline, a series of random plots has been generated by SNH for each property within the DMG to enable individual properties to set up and undertake monitoring which will be representative of significant habitats within the Group area.

2.11.5 Timescales

Under the initial guidance of SNH, suitable sites will be selected and a monitoring schedule for each habitat agreed. The schedule is detailed in the Working Plan (Part 3). Each property will then be responsible for reporting on the condition of their particular habitat.

2.12 DMG Policies and Principles

2.12.1 Culling Policy

It is not possible to draw up a single policy for all deer management units. Culling policy currently varies from property to property, and there are different factors which govern this. Members of the Deer Management Group are encouraged to work collaboratively in aiming to establish an overall population target ratio of approx. 1: 1 stags to hinds.

2.12.2 Competence & Training Policy

Members of the Deer Management Group recognise the need for deer to be managed by trained personnel. A Trained Person is an individual who can produce evidence of training to cover the requirements of Regulation (EC) No 852/2004, and Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 as they apply to wild game. Approved qualifications such as the Deer Stalking Certificate Level 1 & Level 2, and the Certificate in Wild Game Meat Hygiene (large game), is the most robust way in which stalkers can show that they have the appropriate knowledge.

The Group recognises that the requirement for deer to be culled by competent and qualified personnel is in the public interest. The DMG will promote and encourage competence in undertaking deer management activities through the following actions:

- All those involved in the culling of deer, will be suitably experienced or will have attained a formal qualification to meet the minimum standard.
- Members will be encouraged to highlight changes in competency qualifications in the annual return.
- The DMG will assist where possible in the provision/facilitation of training for anyone lacking necessary qualifications or for individuals who wish to enhance their skills.

2.12.3 Communications Policy

Members of the Deer Management Group will promote and encourage effective communication on deer management issues both within the DMG and throughout the wider community in order to promote better awareness and education of deer and deer management through the following actions:

- Deer management planning will be open, inclusive and seek local consultation;
- DMG web-site will be regularly updated to include the Deer Management Plan, Minutes and Agendas for meetings as well as any other relevant information which seeks to promote openness and transparency;
- The DMG will ensure that contact details are available for anyone seeking information or wishing to raise concerns;
- DMG will actively seek opportunities to promote deer management through training, educational or awareness raising events

2.12.4. Non-Native Policy

Sika

Sika deer are established within woodlands throughout the DMG but not on the open range area although the occasional animal is reported. The Group will endeavour to manage existing Sika populations in the DMG area but will endeavour to prevent their spread by shooting on sight (within the legal open seasons) suspected Sika on the open-range and will continue to provide a report to the DMG of cases.

Muntjac

Muntjac are not native to Scotland and as such possible threats to their introduction or establishment must be managed. As such, Muntjac will be managed in accordance with the [Non-Natives Species Code of Practice](#).

Feral Pigs and Feral Goats

Feral Pigs and Feral Goats, should they become established, will be managed according to SNH Policy Guidance (currently in development). In the meantime, sightings of feral pigs and goats will be reported to the DMG and members will manage them to prevent their establishment (taking into consideration welfare of dependent young).

2.12.5 Welfare Policy

Members of the Deer Management Group will promote and encourage the safeguarding of deer welfare both at the scale of the individual animal and at a population scale through the following actions:

- Carrying out all deer management activity to Wild Deer Best Practice Guidance industry standards;
- Promoting the undertaking of deer management training, continual professional development and industry recognised qualifications (e.g. Deer Stalking Certificate Levels 1 & 2);
- Discouraging/reporting unregulated stalking activity;
- Ensuring that the natural habitat supports good welfare through the provision of adequate habitat and shelter;
- Ensuring that any land management operations take into consideration possible effects on deer movements or the availability of shelter; and
- Ensuring that the necessary precautions and checks are undertaken to prevent the spread of diseases.

2.12.6 Policy for Chronic Wasting Disease

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a highly contagious and fatal transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) disease that affects deer. It has had devastating effects on many populations of wild and farmed deer in the USA and Canada and has recently been reported in Norway. It is not known to affect humans. There is no evidence of TSEs in deer in the UK but if it were to become established in the wild deer population it would have major consequences for the UK deer industry. Chronic wasting disease is a notifiable disease. This means that if you suspect it you must tell your nearest [Animal and Plant Health Office \(APHA\) office](#) immediately. Failure to do is an offence. For information on how to spot CWD see <https://www.gov.uk/chronic-wasting-disease>

Members of the Deer Management Group will see to prevent the establishment of CWD through implementing the following:

- Ensuring that all visitors from the USA and Canada are aware of the risks and undertake the appropriate Bio-Security protocols prior to their visit.

- Raising awareness within the DMG and across the wider community about the risks and the symptoms of CWD.

2.12.7 Information Management and Data Protection Policy

DMGs are subject to the The Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) which regulates the use of "personal data". "Personal data" covers any data that can be used to identify a living individual including their name and address, telephone number or e-mail address.

The DMG will only hold and use those details of its members which it needs in order to contact them, i.e. name, address, phone number and email address, in as far as each member is willing to supply those details. These details should normally only be available to those in the DMG who need to have them, e.g. Chair, Secretary or Treasurer, as appropriate.

2.13 Venison Production and Scottish Quality Wild Venison (SQWV)

The DMG currently has no collective approach to carcass collection with each property making their own arrangements with a variety of Game Dealers.

SQWV Ltd (Scottish Quality Wild Venison Ltd) is an independent company which exists to maintain, develop and promote Quality Assurance Standards throughout the whole Venison industry. As a result of the assessments and checks made throughout the food chain on members of the SQWV Assurance schemes consumers know more about the venison they purchase and consume. Group Members will explore opportunities to become members of the scheme (<http://www.sqwv.co.uk>).

2.14 Wildfire Plan

The DMG has a list of Estate contacts which is available on request from the DMG Secretary.