

West Grampian Deer Management Plan

Part 2: Group Operation

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2.1 DMG Objectives and Targets

The purpose of the West Grampian Deer Management Group (WGDMG) 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

WGDMG area covers some **75, 849 ha** and has **23 main members** although cull returns are received for several smaller units within the group. The Group has been split into two smaller Sub Groups to deal more effectively with local practical management issues.

To date the DMG has maintained active communication and engagement with all neighbouring DMGs but in particular with **Cairngorms & Speyside DMG** (CSDMG) and **East Grampians DMG** (EGDMG) to the north/west. It is recognised that given the potential for deer movement between these three DMGs, in order to ensure a landscape approach to deer management, these 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 stag population will be considered as a shared resource 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. Although there will be a certain amount of stag movement across the DMG, it is considered that hind populations are reasonably discreet within the Sub Group areas and the current consensus within the Group suggests that this is a suitable working model for deer management planning purposes. This will be subject to ongoing discussion about deer movements. Deer movements are discussed in more detail in Part 1 of the plan.

2.3 Meetings

WGDMG 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 full DMG holds two principal meeting each year in Spring and Autumn, with the smaller Sub Groups meeting at least two times (also Spring and Autumn) to collate information and to set and agree culls.

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. The purpose of the **Sub Group meetings** is to undertake a detailed review of the previous season 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 West Grampian Deer Management Group (WGDMG) is constituted as a stand-alone Deer Management Group (DMG), this being adopted in **April 2015**. 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

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 West Grampian 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 WGDMG 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 WGDMG 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 5 years. The SNH helicopter count across the Group area 2010 and the Group Foot Count in 2015 forms the baseline for this Plan. This will give 3 helicopter counts since 2001, and provides a very good level of consistent deer count data across the Group area. A helicopter count is planned for 2017.

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 three possible options for the location of plots on a property:

- 1) For those properties in the **Forest of Clunie SPA/SSSI**, a baseline survey of 150 2mx2m plots of Blanket Bog and Dwarf Shrub Heath was carried out by SNH in 2006 using broadly the same

methodology as Best Practice (**See 3.11.7**). These plots were fixed plots and a GPS Grid Reference was recorded for each as well as photographs taken. These plots could potentially be relocated and reassessed.

- 2) For those already conducting HIA on their own property, then continuation of use of those plots would be advised.
- 3) 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.

2.11.6 Monitoring of Vulnerable Heather Stands. The previous plan included methodology for monitoring of areas of muirburn. The purpose of monitoring heather is to be able to respond in time to early signs that heather is being over-grazed. Changes in burning regime and/ or grazing can be initiated if moorland managers have some method of reviewing heather utilisation on a regular basis. Monitoring of vulnerable heather stands is essential if there is to be feedback on these two management tools.

- For those properties wishing to undertake this, it is recommended that at the very least a proportion of burns within the normal winter range of deer and/or sheep are monitored within five years of their burning.
- Using GPS record the centre point of all burns so that a date of burning is established. The aim is not to record the area of the burn although that could be estimated by eye and recorded. This could be done in early summer after the burns are completed or at the time of burning.
- Five years after burning, visit a proportion of burns in April/early May and record heather cover/utilisation and level of dung across burn area. If more than two thirds of heather long shoots are grazed then this would classify as over-grazed. If heather cover is less than presence of old heather stems would suggest was previous cover level, then this would be classified as 'at risk'.
- Different properties may wish or be required to have more intensive heather monitoring. Whatever the level of input, it is essential that some form of feedback is introduced to the group so that progress in those areas currently classified as heavily or moderately impacted can be followed.
- Indications that heather is not regenerating will be fed back into the cull setting process and will be discussed at the DMG meetings to identify possible reasons and solutions. Training in heather condition assessment is an issue which individual properties should take up as part of this monitoring effort and could be organised on a group or individual property basis.
- A report of heather health should be made along with general habitat monitoring feedback for each property that wishes to undertake this so that progress in 'at risk' areas can be followed.

2.11.7 Previous Baseline Monitoring Methodology on the Forest of Clunie SPA/SSSI

The method was founded on 200+ random points for 2m x 2m sample plots on 3 selected habitats (wet heath/blanket bog, flushes and dry heath) across the chosen part of the SPA, namely that part north of the A924 Pitlochry – Kirkmichael road. As described, the method was chosen to be repeatable and there are several data spreadsheets with plot locations and condition assessments recorded.

Sample plots: Impacts were assessed in 2x2m sample plots. Habitat information was available in the form of the National Vegetation Classification (NVC) Survey Map of the area, which was available in digital

format. SNH chose 225 random points for plot locations by random sampling of NVC communities and mosaics containing dry heath (75 points), blanket bog and wet heath (together 75 points), and flushes (75 points) over the site as a whole. At each randomly selected locality the habitat for which the sample point was intended was assessed if it was found to be present within 20m of the original point for dry heath, blanket bog and wet heath or within 100m for flushes. If the intended habitat was not present within the area of search, one of the other habitats was assessed (N.B. only one habitat was assessed at each location). The aim was to achieve 75 sample plots of each of the three habitat types with a maximum of 225 plots in total. A new GPS grid-reference was recorded for each new sample location.

Impact assessment: Grazing and trampling impacts were assessed following the procedures described in MacDonald *et al.* (1998) - A Guide to Upland Habitats, Surveying Land Management Impacts. The small-scale grazing and trampling indicators given in MacDonald *et al.* (1998) appropriate to the habitat were used to assess the degree of current grazing and trampling impacts for each sample plot. Appropriate trend indicators were used to assess long-term trends in impact levels. Using MacDonald *et al.* (1998) each indicator appropriate to the location and time of the year of survey is scored according to three impact classes: Light (L), Medium (M), and Heavy (H). On the basis of all indicators assessed, an overall impact class is then derived. This is done for each individual plot by averaging the individual scores for those indicators that the surveyor found appropriate and reliable for the circumstances to be assessed. To reduce differences in interpretation between observers, a five class scale of impact was used with intermediate categories of impact class added (Light (L), Light-Medium (LM), Medium (M), Medium-Heavy (MH) and Heavy (H)). Trends were assessed as being Constant (C), Increasing (I), Decreasing (D) or not apparent (n).

Photographs: The following three digital photographs were taken of each sample plot:

- s** showing the 2x2m sample plot.
- d** from a distance showing the location of the plot in its surroundings for example showing a distinctive rock nearby; the distance was kept as short as possible
- c** showing a close-up of the vegetation within the 2x2m plot.

Areas at risk of deterioration: Based on all areas surveyed (sample plots and additional areas), areas where Medium-Heavy and Heavy Grazing and trampling impacts prevailed were identified as 'areas at risk of deterioration' with an indication of the main herbivore(s) responsible.

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

There are no established Sika deer within the DMG open range area although the occasional animal is reported. Sika are likely established, however, in areas of woodland. The Group will endeavour to prevent the establishment of Sika in the DMG area by shooting on sight (within the legal open seasons) suspected Sika 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](#)

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).

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. 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 separate Wildfire Plan.