FINAL REPORT

INTRODUCTION
Knoydart Forest Trust manages around 800ha of woodland, roughly half native woodland regeneration and half conifer plantation. The mixed woodland at Inverie (c250ha) is fenced on 3 sides and open to the sea on the fourth side, here we have succeeded in reducing the red and roe deer population to a level that is allowing natural regeneration, our aim is to maintain levels that will allow re-planting of felled areas. This event aimed to develop our own woodland deer management and to offer the same opportunity to other woodland groups. The course was aimed at existing and trainee stalkers who want to develop their woodland deer management skills and techniques and Community Woodland project managers and management groups who want to increase their knowledge and understanding.

The training was provided by:
Linzi Seivwright and James Scott (Deer Commission Scotland)
Colin Lavin (Deer Management Officer, Forestry Commission Scotland)
Derick Macaskill (Wildlife Ranger Manager for Forestry Commission Scotland, Lochaber Forest District),
Jim Brown (Knoydart Foundation Deer Manager)
Grant Holroyd (Knoydart Forest Trust Community Forest Manager).

The course was well attended with 7 visiting delegates from 3 community woodland groups (NWMCWC, Assynt Foundation & Kingsburgh Forest Trust) and 6 local delegates.

KEY LEARNING POINTS
- Why & How we need to manage woodland deer
- Responsibilities and Legal Aspects
- Deer Impact assessment and monitoring
- Practical Woodland Stalking methods and techniques
SHORT SUMMARY OF EACH PRESENTATION

Friday Evening - Village Hall

Background: Grant Holroyd & Jim Brown
- History of the Knoydart Foundation and the Knoydart Forest Trust, and their relationship.
- Description of the woodland areas managed by KFT.
- Outline of the different management objectives for each area.
- Development of deer management in the KFT woods over the last 14 years:
  - initial poor fencing and high deer densities with little management,
  - first attempts at deer control within seasons had limited success,
  - more intensive management has led to today's lower population and successful tree regeneration.

Saturday Morning - Village Hall

Introductions
Delegates all gave a brief explanation of their experience and interest.
See reports from CWA members at the end.

DCS - Linzi Seivwright and James Scott
- Best Practice Guidance - outlined background to, development of, and use of the guides.
- Deer Management and the law:
  - close seasons, night shooting, authorisations
  - Firearms & Ammunition
  - Poaching, Humane Dispatch, Driving Deer
  - Venison, food hygiene, health and safety, waste disposal
  - Natural Heritage Designations
- Deer Managers Responsibilities - food safety, public safety, deer welfare
- Deer ecology and behaviour - Red, Roe, Sika and Fallow deer were described.
- Woodland Deer Impacts
- Monitoring and assessment

FCS - Colin Lavin & Derick Macaskill
- Why manage deer?
  - Objectives: Forest Protection, Habitat Protection, Sporting, Venison, Welfare
- Impacts
  - Types of damage: Browsing, Bark Stripping, Fraying
  - Tree Species - susceptibility, preferred browse species: Soft Conifers & Broadleaves
- How many deer are there?
  - Population Estimates - census v sample
  - Direct Counts: on foot, Helicopter, Digital photography, Thermal imaging
  - Indirect counts: Dung counts, Population reconstruction from cull data.
- How many deer will there be?
  - Fertility, Mortality: Natural & Culled
  - Immigration, Emigration, Population modelling
- Setting the cull
  - Target population density for differing objectives
• Achieving the cull  
  o Forest Design, Equipment, Dogs, Out of season shooting, Night shooting

Local Background - Jim Brown & Grant Holroyd  
‘The way we do things’
  • Monitoring techniques used and interpreting results  
  • Targeting control where needed  
  • Stalking on foot, high seats and night shooting  
  • Kit used.  
  • Changes in techniques through the year.

Saturday Afternoon - Outdoor Sessions
Split into two groups, which swapped over mid-afternoon.

Jim & FCS: woodland stalking techniques
  • Walked a route taking in open ground, native woodland and conifer plantation.  
  • Looked at successful tree regeneration & deer damage to seedlings and saplings.  
  • Looked at high seat design and location.  
  • Discussed how to stalk the ground, using wind, cover, etc.

Grant & DCS: Practical Monitoring exercise
  • Carried out different monitoring techniques  
  • KFT - Transects & quadrats, including dung counts  
    - Circular regeneration plots  
  • DCS - Best Practice techniques  
    - Individual marked trees  
  • Use of GPS to locate

Sunday Morning - Outdoor session
Again, split into two groups, which swapped over mid-morning.

Jim & DCS: Deer Larders
Knoydart Foundation deer larder used as a case study. A large, stone built Victorian larder with minimal modern improvements.
Discussions centred around pros and cons of the facilities at different levels:
  • Minimum compliance required for regulations,  
  • Improvements possible for best practice and good management,  
  • Achieving venison ‘Quality Assured’ status,  
Also discussed were regulation and limitation of processing venison and private sales.

Grant & FCS: Fence Design
Visit to an area of relatively complex deer fencing crossing a road and river, and including a water gate and deer grid.
Discussion on fence design:
  • Pros and cons of fencing v non fencing - effect of scale on management units  
  • Importance of good fence design in terms of landscape, public access, buildability and maintenance  
  • Deer jumps, grids, self closing gates

Sunday Midday - Village Hall
DCS - Linzi Seivwright and James Scott
A follow on from the larder visit, with more detail of:
• Food Hygiene Regulations
• Venison Dealer’s Licence
• Approved Game Handling Establishments (AGHE)
• Trained Hunter Certification
• Regulations pertaining to supply of carcasses to:
  o AGHE’s
  o In skin to final consumer
  o As meat to final consumer
  o As meat through own shop
  o Through shop to retail outlet
• Transport of carcasses
• Abnormal behaviour and diseases in deer
Also some discussion of Venison Marketing.

FCS - Colin Lavin & Derick Macaskill
• Setting cull targets for stalkers:
  o necessary for planning, although preventing damage more important.
• Budgeting, how much does deer management cost?
  o Run through of some facts and figures relating mainly to FCS, including numbers shot, income from venison and sport, and overall costs.
• Discussion of pros and cons of direct vs indirect management:
  o Leasing to sporting tenant.
  o Taking paying stalking clients.

Sunday Afternoon - Village Hall
Members of the local community were invited to join in for a 30 minute presentation from DCS, FCS and KFT (10 mins each), followed by a 30 minute Q&A session.
• Presentations outlined the main objectives and activities of each organisation.
• The question and answer session raised issues such as distribution of and estimate of Roe deer numbers in KFT woods, selection of cull animals in woodland situations, DCS/SNH merger, consultation on changes to the closed seasons.

LIST OF RESOURCES FOR FUTURE REFERENCE
Deer Commission Scotland Best Practice Guidance refer to http://www.bestpracticeguides.org.uk/default.aspx
EVENT PROGRAMME

Friday 29th
6pm  Depart Mallaig Pier  Charter Boat
7pm  Inverie Village Hall  Registration & Background
8pm  Old Forge Pub, Inverie  Dinner (visiting delegates & trainers)

Saturday 30th
9.30am  Village Hall  Introduction: Jim Brown (Stalker) and Grant Holroyd (Community Forest Manager)
        Delegates explain their experience and interest
10.00am  Village Hall  (2 sessions split as app between DCS and FCS)
        DCS
        Best Practice
        Legal aspects, Landowners responsibilities
        Woodland Deer Impact; monitoring and assessment
        Deer ecology, behaviour
        FCS
        Setting objectives
        Woodland Stalking techniques & aids (high seats, lawns, dogs, jumps, Night shooting etc)
        Forest Design for Deer Mangt
12.30pm  Local Background (the way we do things) JB & GH
1pm  Village hall  Lunch Soup & Sands in hall
2-5pm  In the wood practical sessions  (2 groups swap over after 1.5 hrs)
        Jim & FCS: woodland stalking techniques
        Grant & DCS Practical Monitoring exercise
8pm  Old Forge Pub  Dinner (visiting delegates & trainers)

Sunday 31st
9.30 am  Outdoors sessions  Larder, venison, local sales (Jim, Colin + James)
        Fence Design (Grant, Derick + Linzi)
11.30am  Indoors session  (split FCS/DCS as appropriate)
        FCS
        Budgeting, how much does it cost?
        Setting cull targets for stalkers
        Leasing, Guests
        DCS
        Larder, Health & Hygiene, Regulations, Venison Marketing
1pm  Village Hall  Lunch
2pm  Open Session  Tea and Coffee
        Locals invited to join in for 30 minute presentationFrom DCS, FCS, KFT (10 mins each)Followed by 30 minute Q&A session
3/3.15pm  Depart Inverie Pier
LIST OF DELEGATES

Joe Curran  
Kingsburgh Forest Trust  
Secretary

Ian Hepburn  
NWMCW  
Development Manager

Mark Lazzeri  
Assynt Foundation  
Development Manager

John Morrison  
NWMCW  
Treasurer

Russell Robertson  
Assynt Foundation  
Director

Neal Stephenson  
Kingsburgh Forest Trust  
Chairman

Matthew Wrigglesworth  
Assynt Foundation  
Trainee Stalker/Wildlife Ranger

Calum Wilson  
Knoydart Forest Trust  
Apprentice Forester

Iain Wilson  
Knoydart Foundation  
Director / woodland stalker (subcontractor)

Iain Biggart  
Kilchoan Estate  
Deer Stalker

John Urwin  
Kilchoan Estate  
Ghillie

Fred Rous  
Knoydart Foundation  
Ghillie

Steve Dick  
Knoydart Foundation  
Ghillie

Terry Mills  
Knoydart resident

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

Location  
Very good

Organisation  
Very good

Catering  
Very good (with one excellent)

Facilities  
Very good

Expectations  
All respondents said course met their expectations

Reasons for Participation

• To start learning about deer control/management within varied woodlands
• To talk to other practitioners with similar problems particularly managing community expectations and attitude to deer control
• To improve habitat assessment knowledge/technique
• To enable development of deer management policy/programme

Benefits of attendance

• Understanding of areas of activities needing to be undertaken
• Good knowledge of working with deer and woodland areas
• Many in all aspects of both practical and theoretical
• Direct increase in knowledge
• Networking with other CWA members
• Meeting and improving relations with DCS & FCS staff

**Implementation of experience/skills gained**
• Initiate a deer management programme
• Planning for felling and restocking
• Report back to directors
• Follow Best Practice for deer management
• Woodland habitat monitoring

**Recommendation for others to participate in such an event**
All respondents felt it would be beneficial for others for the following reasons:
• Gain broader understanding of practical application of relevant legislation
• Interesting and enjoyable experience
• Benefits of seeing how things are done on the ground
• Networking opportunity

**CWA Further Actions in relation to Woodland Deer Management**
• Provide facility for sharing knowledge between organisations as they progress in this area
• Continue with innovative courses and offer follow-up courses
• Keep plugging away
• Persuade SNH to not lose practical knowledge of DCS staff after merger
• Training in planting, beating-up, thinning processes
• Help with harvesting processing - legislation and techniques

**Other Comments**
• CWA continue to provide excellent value for money and interesting and enjoyable courses
• Well thought out course giving good practical advice - seeing is believing!
• Very worthwhile event for a range of reasons set in spectacular surroundings - keep them coming.
PHOTOGRAPHS

Classroom session in village hall

Grant wows the crowd

Individual tree monitoring

Dinner in The Old Forge

James demonstrates individual marked trees

Discussions on fencing
ANY OTHER INFORMATION RELEVANT TO THE TOPIC

Feedback from the Assynt Foundation:

Assynt Foundation attendance at the CWA Deer and Forest Management training with the Knoydart Forest Trust:

The Assynt Foundation has a section 7 Agreement with the DCS on part of its estate and a number of designated habitats (SSSI, SAC, and SPA), it is also within an NSA. The Foundation’s deer management policy was written at the very beginning of our ownership of the land and has attracted sometimes quite vociferous criticism from some of our neighbouring landowners and members of the community.

Whilst in percentage terms we have only a small area of woodland and an even smaller area of forestry on the estate, they are of enormous importance to us. Any opportunity to further our knowledge and understanding of deer and habitat management is to be welcomed and the Foundation attempts to attend as many such events as possible.

The CWA/KFT event offered distinct additional benefits. Being hosted on a community owned estate allowed us and other attendees to make direct comparisons with our own situation. Community bodies will of necessity face decisions and pressures not experienced by private landowners. It is also usual for community organisations to have a very strong commitment to the sustainable management of the habitats under their control, whilst at the same time balancing the requirement to generate often much needed income form their assets. Other additional benefits included the usual excellence of CWA’s organisational skills and their generosity in supporting attendance and the opportunity to stay in the special surroundings of the Knoydart peninsular.

The classroom sessions conducted jointly by KFT, DCS, and FCS were well presented, interesting and informative. They were run along sufficiently informal lines to encourage good interaction and discussion whilst still being authoritative and covering a lot of topics.

The fieldwork sessions were highly participative and well planned, managing to cater for a wide range of knowledge and experience levels of the participants.

If I were to be hyper critical the only improvement might have been to discuss deer population modelling and cull selection. Though these are perhaps topics of a more specialised nature and best covered by DCS “Best Practice” events.

An excellent event, thoroughly enjoyed and worthwhile.

Marl Lazzeri - Assynt Foundation.

Feedback from NWMCWC:

North West Mull Community Woodland Company Limited (NWMCWCL) was represented by Ian Hepburn, the Development Manager and John Morrison, Treasurer and Director. At present NWMCWCL has no Deer Management policy or activities in place as our woodland blocks at Langamull and West Ardhu are mature (over mature in the case of Langamull), the perimeter fences are in very bad repair or virtually non-existent and we have very little money at present.

The Company recognises however that, once blocks are felled and plans are implemented for replant and regeneration, there will be a need for a Deer Management Plan and mention is made of this in our FDP which is currently being assessed (we expect news on acceptance of this during June 2009).

Whilst creation of and implementation of a Deer Management Plan is some way off, the Company feels that it is never too early to start the learning process and thus Ian and I came
to Knoydart to start the learning process and to make contacts which will be of great benefit in the future. The course met and exceeded all our expectations in the areas of learning, contacts made, meeting again with friends and previous contacts. We recognise that this was a beginning and that there is an awful lot more to learn and a huge amount of work for the future, but it was a great start and the Knoydart environment, the people and the weather were added bonuses to the course itself.

Feedback from Kingsburgh Forest Trust:

The organisation of the event was impressive and very professional. The introductory folder was comprehensive and proved more than useful in remembering who was who and where we were in the proceedings. The balance between indoor presentations and outdoor practical was just right and it was extremely interesting for us to have the chance of seeing your work on the ground. As for the facilities, catering and overall hospitality, all were faultless. Also, it was nice of KFT to have arranged the sunshine and dearth of midges.

Of course, the event also provide an ideal opportunity to network and make friends with other CWA groups. And this we did.

As for the training itself, again we were most impressed. Linzi and James from DCS and Colin and Derek from FCS were equally expert at conveying a great deal of information in a concise and confident manner suitable for the experienced and the less so, in my own case. Jim and Grant's contribution was of particular interest as they are the practitioners on the ground and have to deal with practical deer management on a daily basis. I came knowing less than little of woodland deer management and left a lot more knowledgeable and aware of the many issues relating to this subject.