

# Appendix 8 – Deer Management Plan

The Deer management plan (DMP) should be read in conjunction with the Glenelg Peninsula Land Management Plan 2024-2034 (LMP) and with the FLS Deer Management Strategy. This document was written by Russell Cooper, Wildlife Ranger Manager for FLS North Region (April 2024).

## 1.0 Introduction

Forestry and Land Scotland's 'Glenelg Peninsula' landholdings extend to roughly 2,678 hectares, occupying two discrete areas or forest blocks – Ardintoul/Berneria and Moyle/Ratagan/Leachachan - situated on the west coast of Scotland with shores onto the Kylerhea Narrows (with Skye beyond) to the west, Loch Alsh to the north and Loch Duich to the east.

The management objectives of the LMP are: -

- Consolidate future productive woodland onto the most suitable, practically managed terrain – *felling/restructuring focus on vulnerable slopes and plantations on ancient woodland sites.*
- Conserve, expand and connect native woodland habitat – *focused on ancient semi-natural woodland remnant expansion, riparian corridor initiation and extension and phased PAWS restoration.*
- Protect and improve water quality and associated riparian and loch-side habitat – *an important contributory factor to maintaining favourable status of designated Lochs Duich and Alsh*
- Increase the resilience of the landholding to withstand the anticipated impacts of climate change – *including productive forests, semi-natural habitats, underlying soil/peat, terrain/slopes and waterbodies.*
- Improve the scenic value of the landholding - *to achieve a more sympathetic and integrated fit with broader landscape character.*
- Support and maintain public access to the landholding.

The Glenelg Peninsula forest blocks are enclosed by a maintained perimeter deer fence (approximately 30 km) along its uphill boundary – but not where the landholding directly adjoins the coast. This is complemented by a deer grid on the C1223 road where the fence crosses the public road south-west of Ratagan which – combined with perimeter deer fencing on a neighbouring Letterfearn estate - creates a continuous internal fenced enclosure (*see also section 6.0*).

## 2.0 Deer management objectives

### 2.1 National objectives

- Contribute to Scottish Forestry's Forestry Strategy (also includes climate change).
- Adherence to the FLS Deer Management Strategy.
- Contribute to the Scottish Government's Scottish Biodiversity Strategy.

### 2.2 Local objectives

- Protect the National Estate from unacceptable impacts by deer (e.g. less than 10% leader browsing damage by deer on all 1-to-5-year planting coupes and minimise bark stripping/fraying to all crop age classes.)
- Aim for total deer densities to be in the range of 3-7 deer/km<sup>2</sup>.
- Meet tree stocking density targets per hectare at year 5.
- Protect all biological resources on the National Estate from the negative impacts of browsing/grazing herbivores. This includes all tree crops, Planted Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS), adjacent designated sites (SAC), private water supplies and other locally designated areas (e.g. SAMs).
- Contractor and authorised controllers ensure good relationships with members of the public, other forestry customers, and FLS staff.

### 3.0 Deer species and other herbivores

Red, Roe and Sika deer are found throughout the Glenelg forests and open ground with reds being the predominant species. Roe previously scarce have increased due to the improved habitat since 21<sup>st</sup> century restructuring commenced and as a consequence of the reduction of red deer numbers. Sika are still few in number and mainly stags immigrating in.

Feral goats occasionally enter Ratagan over the cattle grid and are herded back out to NTS Kintail where they came from. FLS have and will cull goats if they regularly return.

Sheep trespass is a regular occurrence in the Ratagan forest due to locals leaving open the gate on the public road next to the grid, this is owned by Highland Council, a similar situation exists on the public road above Moyle. FLS staff herd sheep out when this occurs.

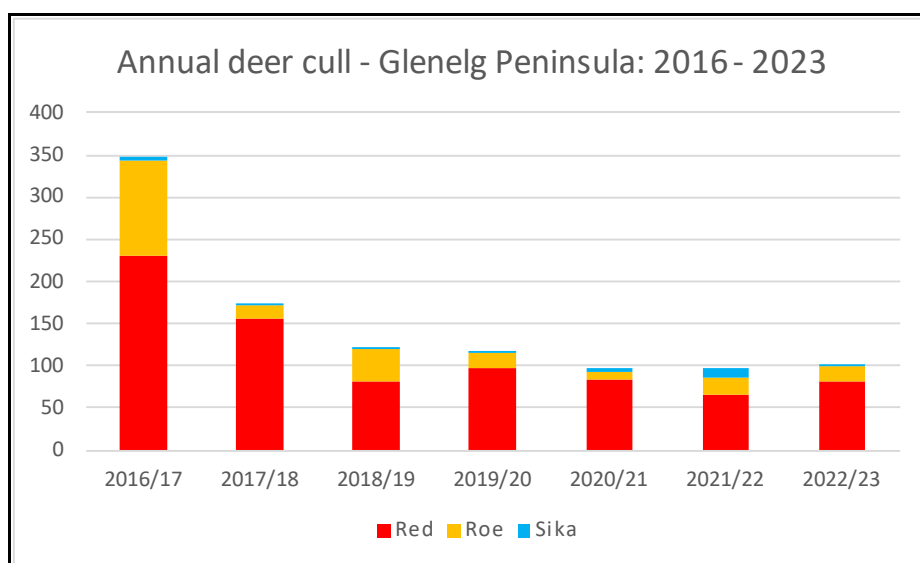
Note: Feral pigs are not present to date but have been seen and shot within 5 kms. FLS will cull feral pigs either by shooting or by the use of corral and shooting.

### 4.0 Management to date

Strath Caulaidh spring mean deer densities for 2020 were reported as 5 red and 1 roe/sika per 100 ha.

Cull data for the last seven years for the LMP area is presented below. LMP section 4.2 provides more detail on current management objectives of deer control.

	Red	Roe	Sika	Total
<b>2016/17</b>	231	112	4	<b>347</b>
<b>2017/18</b>	155	16	2	<b>173</b>
<b>2018/19</b>	82	37	1	<b>120</b>
<b>2019/20</b>	97	19	1	<b>117</b>
<b>2020/21</b>	83	9	6	<b>98</b>
<b>2021/22</b>	65	22	10	<b>97</b>
<b>2022/23</b>	82	17	2	<b>101</b>



The cull data clearly demonstrates immigration is a problem to FLS forests in this area. The culls are set yearly to maintain the current low density but also accounting for immigration.

## 5.0 An evidence-based approach.

FLS use an information-based decision-making process to set its deer management operations with the data received from various internal and external reports. All data is then combined as best possible and applied to a population model which is used to set culls. Data used to create this DMP can be found in the FLS Deer Dashboard. (Currently only available to FLS staff, however, it will be made publicly available soon.)

Sources might include any, or several, of the following:

- Thermal drone counts
- Herbivore dung counts
- Historical cull data
- Sighting data
- Ranger daily/monthly reports
- Deer Management Contractor daily/monthly reports
- Helicopter counts
- WRM surveys
- Strath Caulaidh survey data, independently obtained (i.e. deer density, impacts - NN/HIA, SDA, etc.).

## 6.0 Population modelling and future cull.

### Ratagan

With the Ratagan forest only being partially deer fenced, neighbours' efforts to maintain their deer fences and what they cull directly effects deer densities within Ratagan forest. The level of immigration into the forest is not possible to predict.

### Benera

Benera forest is deer fenced but relies on gates being closed and deer failing to break through the fence. **Fences** are inspected yearly or immediately if a problem is suspected or reported. Fence inspection is by FLS staff and repairs are usually by the same team. Replacement of long sections of fence is usually by fencing contractors.

Experience has shown that Roe and Sika easily pass under a deer fence through gaps used by foxes and badgers.

## 7.0 Resources to deliver deer cull.

Glenelg Peninsula forests are currently managed by a wildlife contractor overseen by FLS deer staff.

All controllers are qualified to Deer Stalking Certificate levels 1 and 2. In addition, all controllers are required to carry out an annual firearms skills test, ensuring the highest levels of safety and competency when undertaking their duties. Rangers also complete additional self-checklists and training at set intervals that are part of the resumption system. FLS Wildlife Rangers are supported by a Wildlife Ranger Manager and Area Wildlife Manager.

Wildlife contractors are a vital resource in the FLS deer management 'toolbox'. Wildlife contractors are selected after satisfying FLS of their competence via a competitive tender. This work is arduous and critical to the success of the impact reduction strategy and only very experienced and appropriately qualified contractors are considered. All Wildlife contractors have the same qualifications as FLS Wildlife Rangers and both compliance and health and safety are continually monitored by the Wildlife Ranger Manager.

Out of season shooting is an essential tool in the protection of vulnerable tree crops and natural habitats. This is conducted either under the General License issued by NatureScot for enclosed woodland or by 5(6) authorisation on application to NatureScot for un-enclosed woodland. Male deer of all species will be shot year-round on the National Estate and, following permission, the shooting of females out of season will be limited to the periods 1st September to 20th October and 16th February to 31st March. When early out of season shooting of females is carried out any dependent young will be shot first.

Night shooting is permitted by the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996 as amended by the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act 2011 (WANE Act), under section 18(2) authorizations granted by NatureScot. Applications for night shooting will only be made where unacceptable levels of damage would occur, and where the use of all other legal means of control, including out of season shooting have been considered. Operational dates for night shooting will be kept under review and can be changed should circumstances dictate. All operations will conform to current best practice guidance and a copy of these will be held at the district office and issued to wildlife rangers as necessary. Night shooting is a valuable tool in areas of high deer management pressure where the population has become wise to deer management practices.

## 8.0 Infrastructure

Infrastructure and access within both Forests are developed with a network of forest roads and quad tracks however from steep ground dragging carcasses is the only option.

All FLS Wildlife Rangers have the following kit as standard and similar is used by wildlife contractors: -

- 4 x 4 vehicle with either a winch or loading crane attached to the back to aid in loading carcasses safely.
- Capstan rope to aid in extraction when far away from roads.
- 4 x 4 ATV with winch.
- Trailer to transport ATV.
- Sledge/hill trailer to aid in extraction using the ATV.
- .270 calibre rifle with high magnification scope.
- Binoculars.
- Handheld thermal imager to increase herbivore detection.
- Various knives, saws and PPE.
- Access to thermal drone and pilot.

The deer larder is in the village of Achmore near Kyle of Lochalsh and has a capacity for forty deer.

## 9.0 Collaborative working opportunities.

The Glenelg Peninsula forests fall within the Glenelg DMG area however they are separated from the bulk of the estates by a long strategic deer fence. FLS staff attend DMG meetings.

FLS welcome the opportunity to work collaboratively but in this area the land management objectives generally make this incompatible.

## 10.0 Venison

FLS subscribes to the Scottish Quality Wild Venison (SQWV) scheme with all venison quality assured and currently sold to Highland Game Ltd. based in Dundee for the provision of a natural, sustainable, healthy product for the food industry. All animal by-products are sold to Highland Game along with the venison. All waste from larders is removed by a licensed waste disposal contractor.