



Appendix II

Deer Management Plan (DMP) for South Knapdale Long Term Plan

Background

This Deer Management Plan (DMP) should be used as a supporting document for the South Knapdale Long Term Plan (LTP). The DMP should also be used in conjunction with FLS Deer Management Strategy.

National & Local objectives

National strategies and objectives

Contributing to [Scottish Forestry - Forestry Strategy](#) (also includes Climate Change):

Deer will be managed to help ensure Scotland has a healthy, diverse ecosystem, contributing to our climate change objectives, whilst also contributing to our national and local economy in line with Scottish Government objectives and public interest.

- Lower deer densities to 2-7 per 100ha to ensure the above objectives can be met sustainably.
- Ensure >95% of designated sites are in favorable condition
- Achieve less than 10% leader browsing damage on all first year restock coupes.
- Ensure Stocking Density Assessment at year 5 achieves productive forest objectives of 2500 per hectare.
- Ensure >95% of designated sites are in favorable condition meaning that the features for which SSSIs or Natura sites are designated are in satisfactory condition; or are recovering, with the necessary management measures in place, such that Naturescot predicts, using expert judgement, that the land will in due course reach favourable condition.

Deer Management Strategy [Deer management strategy - Forestry and Land Scotland](#):

Deer will be managed to help ensure Scotland has a healthy, diverse ecosystem, contributing to our climate change objectives, whilst also contributing to our national and local economy in line with Scottish Government objectives and public interest. Management of the deer population will be done in a professional, humane and cost-effective way, ensuring the physical wellbeing of

the remaining deer populations within the forest boundaries. Venison income will be optimised and opportunities to create revenue from recreational deer management permissions (RDMP) will be taken, but without compromising the over-riding issue of minimising negative impacts by grazing herbivores.

Outcome 2 of the FLS Corporate Plan 2022 – 2025 Looking after Scotland’s national forests and land and specifically:

- “In the face of climate change, we need to take particular care to increase the resilience of the national forests and land, while protecting and enhancing our natural assets so that they can continue to provide their many benefits for us. FLS can make a particular contribution in this area by tackling tree disease and pests; carefully managing deer numbers to non-damaging levels; and removing invasive non-native species.”
- Continuing to implement the FLS Deer Management strategy while working in partnership with others to support the Scottish Government’s response to the Independent Panel’s recommendations on deer management in Scotland.

Regional strategies and objectives

The main objective of deer management within the West Region is to manage deer populations at a level that is compatible with FLS environment and other management objectives. The aim is:

- to prevent unacceptable damage to commercial tree crops;
- to maintain or enhance biodiversity in key areas;
- to protect all designated sites.
- to allow diversity of tree species

FLS deer management teams generally try to maintain deer densities at 2-7 deer per 100ha (and ideally less than 5 per 100ha).

Protection priorities

Map 19a-c Areas of Priority Deer Management shows the future habitats of the forest overlain by the current stands less than 10 years old or awaiting restocking together with the areas that will change from mature to restock or habitat restoration sites in the next 10 years.

The most sensitive sites for deer browsing (or trampling) during the plan period will be:

- Designated woodland sites
- Soft conifer restocks
- PAWS undergoing restoration
- Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland

Constraints & Solutions:

- Access – overgrown ATV tracks, overgrown roads

Liaison with Civil Engineering team, ATV track clearance contracts

- Sightlines & visibility – high proportion of thicket stage and beyond conifers, roadside regeneration blocking view onto poorly regenerating areas beyond.

Liaison with Planning, Environment and Civil Engineering teams to identify areas which can be cleared.

- Public access – moderate levels of public access.

Use night shooting in the early hours when access is likely to be at its lowest. Use of thermal binoculars to check for unseen people.

Deer Species and other Herbivores

Red, Roe and Sika deer are present in all three forests. Very limited sheep grazing on adjacent ground with no issues from ingress in recent years. There is no feral pig activity in Mid-Argyll or Kintyre.

Current deer management

The deer culls in South Knapdale are currently carried out by FLS Wildlife Ranger (Meall Mhor), Deer Management Permission (Meall Mhor) and Contract stalkers in Torinturk/Coulaghaitro forests. The plan is for the Permission to not be renewed at the end of its lease period in 2029.

NB 2021/22 still had some Covid restrictions. 2022/23 dealt with under-culling during Covid.

Cull achievement

	Red			Roe			Sika			Total
	stag	hind	calf	buck	doe	kid	stag	hind	calf	
2021/22	99	41	23	9	6	8	24	9	14	233
2022/23	117	40	29	24	31	29	66	55	22	413
2023/24	127	79	55	26	7	6	36	22	13	371
2024/25	115	66	41	14	17	11	59	14	9	346
2025/26	108	80	39	12	11	2	58	32	12	354

Fence condition

These blocks are surrounded by a mix of stock and deer fencing, the latter is ineffective in reducing deer immigration from the neighbouring properties due to age and condition, plus higher deer densities on neighbouring ground.

The deer fencing is currently in relatively poor condition, with significant investment required in the next 5 years to reinstate it to deer proof condition.

Stock fencing is thought to be in reasonable condition, with no sheep ingress in recent years.

Geography

Access constraints

Terrain

Peatland

Public access

The recreation use of the blocks forming South Knapdale forest is medium/low with dog walking and mountain biking, being the main activities.

Neighbouring land use

Agriculture

Commercial forestry with leased sporting deer management

Evidence Base for Future Management

Last Formal Survey/Results

Thermal drone counts:

A thermal drone survey was undertaken in Torinturk and Meall Mhor in March 2024, see Annex [1 & 2] for full reports.

SDA/Nearest Neighbour Survey results:

No data is available for the last 5 years

Designated Sites, PAWS and ASNW Surveys:

Meall Mhor forest block includes Artilligan & Abhainn Srathainn SSSI which is currently in Favourable condition (last assessed 2023) the main threats include deer browsing and INNS.

PAWS surveys were last undertaken in Torinturk and Meall Mhor in 2023 and indicate a typical browsing pressure of High and Medium/High respectively when averaged across all polygons.

No recent ASNW surveys have been undertaken.

Population Modelling and Future Culls

The population models are in Annex 3 & 4.

There are several caveats in the use and interpretation of the model and it has to be used in conjunction with the impact assessments. There has been a recent change in the model used, from a baseline density starting point i.e. using data from thermal drone surveys or dung counting; to a cull regression model i.e. calculating the likely starting population density based on what has been culled see Tab 1 of the Population Model for full details. This model was developed in conjunction with Forest Research.

All three forests are strongly influenced by external deer populations and movements. In the case of Meall Mhor, red deer especially come in off the open hill in bad weather looking for shelter.

Coulaghailtro and Torinturk are thought to have a less seasonal movement, with a constant flux of deer moving back and forth between the FLS block and the private forestry in between. Discussions with the private woodland manager suggests they are shooting far fewer deer per year than FLS and that this private woodland is currently being managed on more of a sporting basis.

This constant re-supply of deer leads to FLS culling a disproportionate number of deer in comparison with the size of the blocks, and this trend is likely to continue into the future. This also leads to the model suggesting higher future culls than are potentially achievable taking into account the variability of deer presence, increasing vegetation cover and the practicalities of culling these numbers.

FLS will continue to set challenging minimum cull targets (around 350-400) to deal with deer numbers and also develop liaison with the neighbouring forest managers.

Objectives

Target density for deer 2-5 deer per 100ha with the aim of achieving 3 deer per 100ha

Objective	FLS Target(s)	Assessment method
Produce quality timber of all conifer species	2,500 live stems per ha at Year 1 of re-stocks	Crops assessed in the 1st year by the FM team
	No more than 10% of leading shoots on new trees browsed by deer in Year 1 and Year 2	Crops assessed annually after their 1st year as part of the national 'Nearest Neighbour' survey
	2,500 live stems per ha at Year 5 on re-stocks	Crops assessed in the 5th year by the planning team
	Less than 20% stem forked trees at Year 5 on re-stocks	Crops assessed in the 5th year by the planning team
Protect the environment	Deliver 'Favourable Condition' of designated sites (e.g. SSSI, SAC)	Habitat assessed by the Environment Team as required
	Protect native woodland or expand (PAWS)	Native woodland assessed by the Environment Team as required
	Establish planted broadleaf trees at 1,600 stems per ha at Year 5 on re-stock sites	Planted trees assessed in the 5th year by the planning team
	Establishment of native woodland through natural regeneration	Assessed between yr 5 and yr 10 following felling by the planning team

This DMP will be reviewed regularly, as a minimum at years 5 and 10, to consider if the proposed actions have led to reductions in herbivore pressure and if these impacts are sufficient to promote acceptable growth of desired species.

Protection Options

Culling

Deer control is currently by qualified stalkers both FLS staff (Meall Mhor) and Contractors (Torinturk and Coulaghaitro) and in the northern section of Meall Mhor on a retained sporting Agreement, with 2-3 years remaining. Culling takes place in season, along with out of season and night shooting authorisations.

The modelling supports an increase in the cull over the next 5 years to bring the populations of red, roe and sika deer down to the target of under 5 deer per 100ha.

Fencing

The current effective deer fencing is porous for all blocks.

Coulaghaitro and Torinturk

Most boundaries will not be possible to fence to a deer-proof condition over any meaningful length of time due to the intimate nature of neighbouring forests and the associated high risks of windblow or snapped tops damaging the fence. This leaves ongoing, landscape scale culling as the only option for crop protection and population management/reduction.

Meall Mhor

The southern half of Meall Mhor has a very similar situation to the forests above, with private forestry surrounding it.

The northern half has some better potential for fencing against deer coming in from the open hill, although without being able to complete a ringfence the benefits could be questionable.

Infrastructure

Access Requirements

All forest blocks are well roaded although significant vegetation management is required to preserve these roads.

There are currently ca 40km of ATV track serving individual restock coupes. Further ATV access tracks are required to facilitate the extraction of carcasses. In-forest access tracks are identified for restocking areas at the time of restocking with the EIA screening requests and prior notifications are submitted where required. Many of the older ATV tracks, and some forest roads, are becoming overgrown with tree regeneration and require management intervention to make them navigable once more.

Deer Management Zones

Open space and glades are vital to aid deer control. The rolling programme of harvesting provides transitory open space for deer culling. The open areas along the riparian areas are also important although over time these have and will continue to develop a more woodland structure with up to 50% native tree canopy. It is important to identify some areas of permanent open glades to facilitate ongoing deer management as the surrounding forest infills with growing trees.

Larder facilities

The Cairnbaan deer larder serves each of these forests. FLS subscribe to the Scottish Quality Wild Venison (SQWV) scheme. All venison is quality assured and sold to Highland Game (2026).

Collaborative working opportunities

Initial discussions have been held with neighbouring forest and deer managers during the development of the LTP, and positive working relationships have been established where interests are aligned. FLS will continue to strengthen these connections, recognising that neighbouring land managers may have differing deer management objectives.

FLS has also held positive initial discussions with NatureScot and Action West Loch regarding deer populations across the wider landscape and the potential establishment of a South Knapdale Deer Management Group.