Deer Management Plan (DMP) –Scootmore

Background

This DMP should be used as a supporting document/annex for the Land Management Plan (LMP). The DMP should also be used in conjunction with FLS Deer Management Strategy.

National & Local objectives

National

* Contributing to [Scottish Forestry - Forestry Strategy](https://forestry.gov.scot/forestry-strategy) (also includes Climate Change)
* Deer Management Strategy [Deer management strategy - Forestry and Land Scotland](https://forestryandland.gov.scot/what-we-do/who-we-are/corporate-information/deer-management-strategy?highlight=deer%20strategy)
* Scottish Biodiversity Strategy [Biodiversity strategy: consultation - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-biodiversity-strategy-consultation/)

Local

* Contribute to wider deer management.
* Manage deer to reduce numbers for public safety from road traffic collisions.

Scootmore LMP

The Areas within the LMP consist of Scootmore and Delnapot forests with a combined area of 458 ha.

Most of the long term owned FLS forest consists of Scots Pine and Sitka Spruce with small areas of broadleaves and other conifers.

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What are we going to protect?

* To allow the establishment of a wider diverse range of tree species.
* To allow CCF to be successful.
* Re-establish native riparian woodland.
* To achieve less than 10% damage to leaders on all commercial restocks.
* High value quality timber crops.
* Protection of water courses and improve water quality.

Deer Species (and other herbivores)

* Both Red and Roe deer are found throughout the forest.
* There has been a traditional long-standing movement of the deer across the wider deer range, with the local population of red deer being extremely transient. This movement, which is difficult to quantify, poses a significant challenge in both setting culls and crop/habitat protection.

What have we done to date?

Deer culls from Scootmore and Delnapot:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **Red** | **Roe** | **Total** |
| 2020 | 13 | 42 | 55 |
| 2021 | 13 | 27 | 40 |
| 2022 | 9 | 15 | 24 |
| 2023 | 13 | 28 | 41 |
| 2024 | 13 | 34 | 47 |

* The culls have been achieved using FLS ranger staff along with a Deer management contract culling team.
* Accurate cull setting based on population modeling cull data evidence in the Scootmore area is challenging, with a transient population of deer means the population within the forest varies constantly.
* **Impacts** - the 2018 Nearest Neighbour survey carried out gave a 3-year average of 61.7% damage attributed to deer.
* **Fencing -** There is no perimeter deer fence, but internal fenced enclosures exist to protect establishment of native broadleaves in southern areas of the LMP

Geography

* The terrain within the Scootmore LMP area is primarily rolling forest and farmland within the Spey valley. The Deer Management Unit (DMU) ranges in altitude from 180 to 300 metres above sea-level.

Have an evidence based approach

* Cull setting within this LMP is extremely challenging, due in principle to the substantial transient deer population. Locally there are extensive privately owned forests and agricultural ground forming an ideal landscape for deer, Roe deer.
* Regular deer surveys will be conducted by FLS staff utilizing a drone to provide regular count data which will help with planning future cull targets.

Link to Deer Dashboard

* Some of the data used to create this DMP can be found in the FLS Deer Dashboard.

Population Modeling and Future Culls

FLS uses an information-based decision-making process to set its deer management operations with the data received from various internal and external reports which can include.

* Thermal drone counts
* Herbivore dung counts
* Historical cull data
* Sighting data
* Ranger daily/monthly reports
* Deer Management Contractor daily/monthly reports
* Helicopter counts
* Strath Caulaidh Survey data, independently obtained – i.e., Deer density figure, impacts - NN/HIA, SDA, etc.
* Browsing impact levels

All data obtained is then used in conjunction with a population model to set future deer culls.

The 2025-26 cull figure of: Red deer -20 and Roe deer 25 will be challenging to achieve. This figure will likely remain high for the coming years to work towards reducing the background deer population and target the migratory red deer population which is having a negative impact on the development of the forest and unacceptable browsing damage, along with encroaching onto neighbouring farmland.

Protection Options – cull/fence/tubes

The full spectrum of protection options available will be used within this LMP.

* Culling: across the site to continue to reduce the background deer population and target sensitive areas.
* Small, fenced enclosures to protect stands of trees for seed source and riverbank -riparian stabilization.
* Protection of palatable species, primarily broadleaves within fenced enclosures
* Tubes for isolated pockets of native hardwoods where they are best suited.

How will objectives be met?

* The Scootmore LMP area will be managed by a using both Wildlife Ranger staff and Deer Management Contract staff.
* All controllers are qualified to Deer Stalking Certificate levels 1 & 2. In addition, all conduct an annual firearms skills test, ensuring the highest levels of safety and competency when undertaking their duties.
* Deer management contractors are a vital resource in FLS’ s deer management toolbox which are selected after satisfying FLS of their competence via a competitive tender. All Deer Management Contractors must meet the FLS standards of health and safety, compliance and be trained to the level of deer management like that of the FLS wildlife staff.
* 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) authorizations on application to NatureScot for un-enclosed woodland. Male deer of all species will be culled year-round on FLS land following permission, the shooting of females out of season will be limited to the periods 1st of September to 20th October and from the 16th of February to the 31st of March. When early out of season culling of females is conducted any dependent young will be culled 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. All operations will conform to current Best Practice Guidance and a copy of the guides will be issued to Wildlife Rangers and Contractors, as required. Night shooting is a valuable tool in areas of high deer management pressure where the population has become wise to deer management practices.

Roads/ATV tracks/glades/larders/equipment

* Infrastructure and access within the LMP area is well planned but proves challenging to maintain and keep clear due to a combination of windblow and considerable regen.
* Effective deer control requires open areas, well planned along with a network of open corridors, ATV routes and forest roads kept clear of regeneration.
* New infrastructure is planned and installed at the restock stage and foresters consult with the wildlife team to decide the best location for access tracks.
* Open areas, riparian zones have been left to grow over with regen in recent years which has led to less open areas to shoot deer. This has been mainly due to the lack of resource (In particular the availability of hand cutters), however, the future plans for this LMP area will require a more robust focus to ensure an infrastructure maintenance program is in place and delivered and ongoing which will restore open areas and create shooting opportunities. It is vital that at the restock phase the wildlife team participates in discussions and planning so that open areas can be retained where possible and where they will benefit from deer control.
* Flailing of the road’s edge can also increase visibility of deer and vegetation clearance that coincides with Civils Road maintenance programs will be explored.

All FLS Wildlife Rangers have the following kit as standard:

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

The Main Deer larder is situated at Balnacoul, this has a hanging capacity of 30 carcasses and is in good condition and maintained to an extremely high standard. There is in addition to the main larder a chiller trailer with a holding capacity of a further 20 carcasses.

Collaborative Working

None in place at present.

DMG present

None in place.

Venison

* FLS subscribe to the Scottish Quality Wild Venison (SQWV) scheme. This sets the standards for our larders and actions of our staff and contractors to ensure we provide a safe food item for the market.
* All venison is quality assured and sold to Highland Game where it is further processed.
* All waste from the larders is removed by a licensed waste disposal contractor.
* All animal by-products are sold to Highland Game along with the venison.