

Appendix 9 - Deer Management Plan (DMP)

Background

This DMP is a supporting document/appendix to the South Loch Ness Land Management Plan (LMP) 2026-2036. It also relates/is to be used in conjunction with FLS' current Deer Management Strategy - reflecting FLS commitment to implement cull resources to achieve sustainable deer and wildlife management in this area.

Local objective

In line with the FLS national deer strategy, the main objective locally for this DMP is the further reduction of a well-established wild deer population in the area. FLS is committed to reducing the overall deer density in the LMP area, within the parameters of National Objectives. Links to national documents are provided below (National Objectives) for further reference.

To support the over-arching objectives of the LMP (**section 1.1**). Most relevant for deer management are:-

- the increasing proportion and extent of broadleaved trees being established and growing on the landholding and
- the reduced age structure of all woodland (significant removal of mature/over-mature trees and consequent re-establishment).
- FLS target density currently sits between 3 and 7 deer per square kilometre nationally. This is lower than the NatureScot prescription of 10 deer per square kilometre at a landscape scale as FLS understand that in certain sensitive habitats further reduction in density is required for successful establishment and regeneration. At this time the ambient level of deer across the entire landholding needs to be reduced further before specific targets can be applied in these areas.

Broadleaves in particular have increased susceptibility to browsing and resultant damage often resulting in tree mortality whilst the increased variety of age classes of the entire forest offers increased extent of shelter for deer which in turn can hinder effective localised management. Deer numbers need to be at a level that facilitates successful establishment of these more palatable and sensitive species for the LMP to meet its objectives. Key habitats and woodland types encountered within the LMP area – and requiring deer management to succeed are:

- Productive conifers growing for timber production (non-native species)
- Productive conifer & broadleaves (native)
- Areas of PAWS restoration and other areas prescribed for native woodland restructuring (natural regeneration and restocking). The LMP has ambitious broadleaf establishment targets in Knockie and Farigaig in particular and reduction of *overall* deer density in this area will ultimately support establishment success of this element.
- A significant (localised) area of proposed peatland restoration
- Easter Ness Forest SSSI & Ness Woods SAC – improve condition overall via the reduction of herbivore impact on native broadleaves. Due to over grazing the current assessed condition is unfavourable no change as of previous site condition monitoring carried out by Nature Scot.
- Extensive open ground habitat with co-dependent wildlife species (e.g. black grouse, raptors, lower plant assemblages).

National objectives

These are contained within the following corporate strategy documents:

- Deer Management Strategy [Deer management strategy - Forestry and Land Scotland](#)
- Scottish Biodiversity Strategy [Biodiversity strategy: consultation - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)
- And contributing to [Scottish Forestry - Forestry Strategy](#) (this also includes Climate Change).

Note: Deer management policy and strategy is a constantly evolving field in which FLS are actively engaged and then responsive to changes made to legislation and required working practices, targets etc.

Deer Species (and other herbivores)

The predominant deer species are Sika, Red and Roe deer. Sika Deer currently make up the majority of the deer population, with Red Deer making up another significant portion of the population. Roe make up a smaller proportion, however they present a disproportionate and significant threat to the successful establishment of planted and regenerating trees, particularly native broadleaved species.

A small population of Feral Wild Goats is established in the LMP area and are culled opportunistically by contract staff . Due to the free roaming nature of the goats and their existence in small numbers they are not considered to be a major threat to achieving objectives.

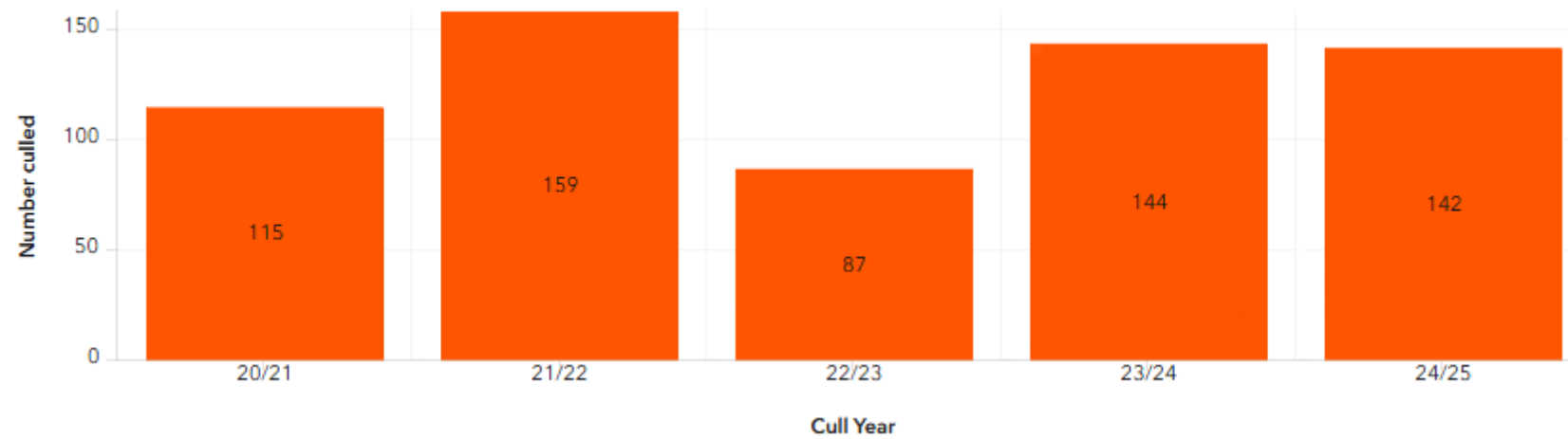
There are significant numbers of livestock grazing fields surrounding the forests that would impact upon the objectives of the LMP if there were serious incursions into the area. The local Wildlife Ranger Manager (WRM) and supervisor will work with local agricultural enterprises and the department of agriculture, to make sure that any major incursions are dealt with swiftly.

Historic Deer Management

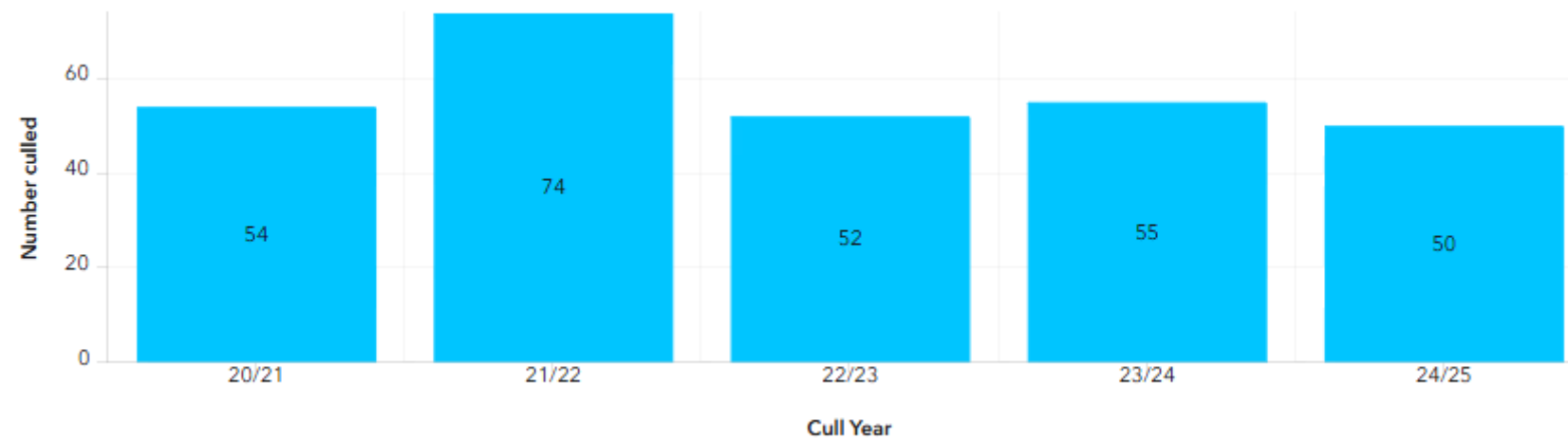
In the previous 5 years, FLS have produced average annual cull of 838 deer - inclusive of all species. It is widely accepted that a percentage of these will have come from incursions from neighbouring landholdings. This generally happens around wintertime when deer migrate down from high ground to seek shelter. The purpose of including this data is to highlight that although a consistently high cull has been successfully achieved annually, incremental decreases in overall population are slow. The following bar chart presents a specific breakdown by species for the last five year period:

Red Deer: both genders and all age classes

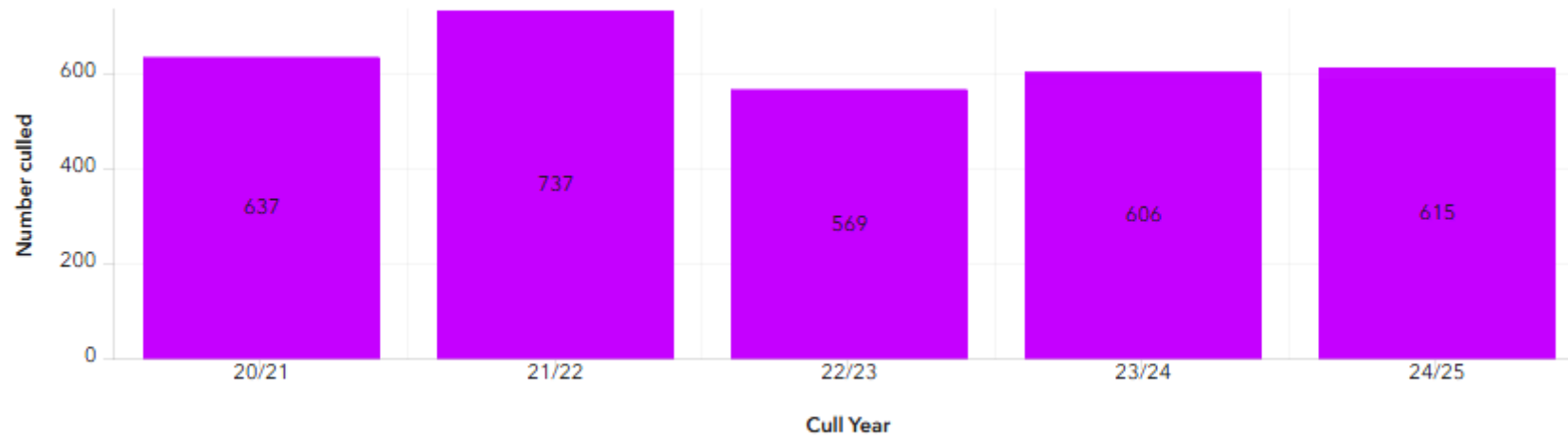
Deer cull by year



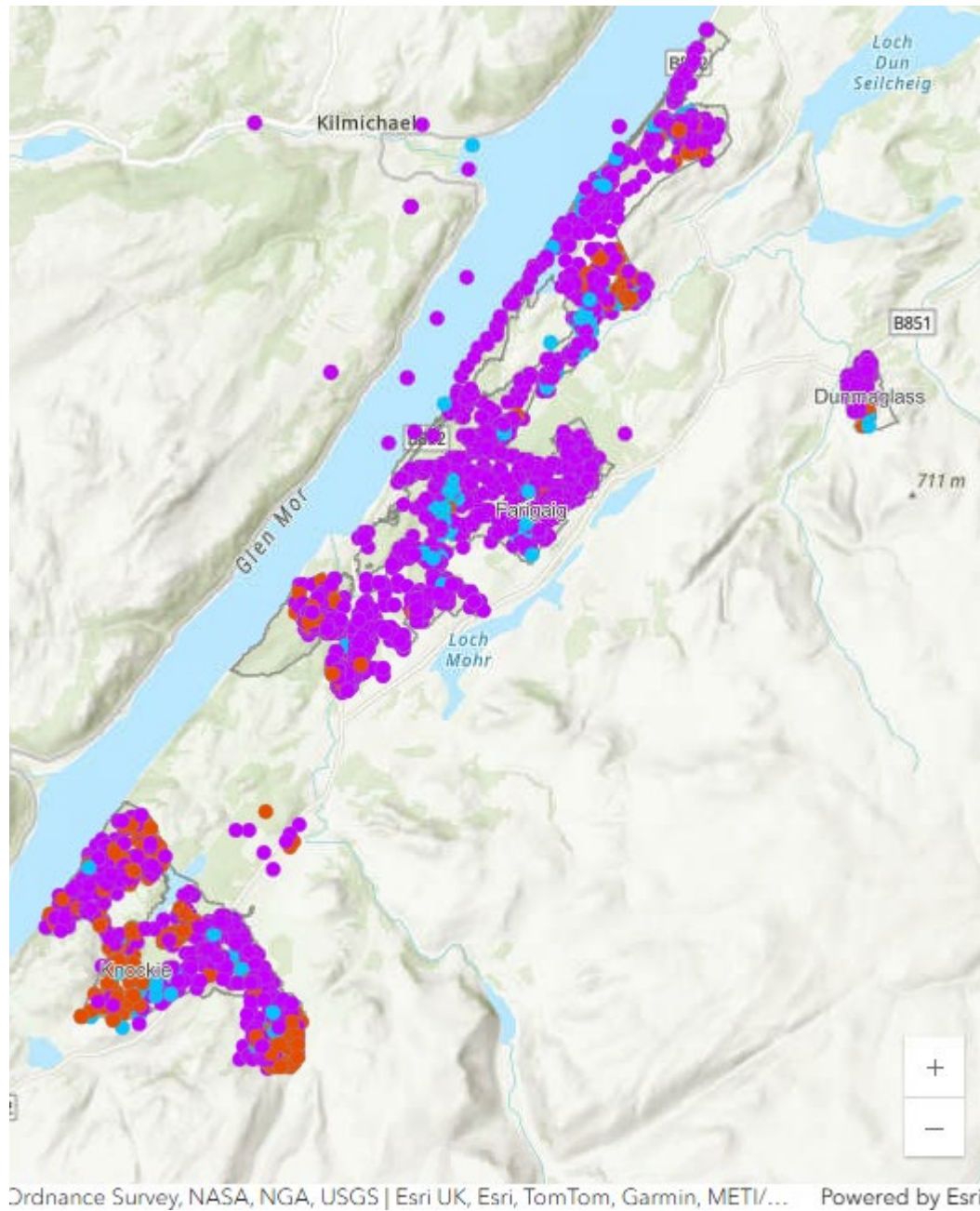
Roe Deer: both genders and all age classes



Sika Deer: both genders and all age classes



Historic cull locations are illustrated on the following map and shows effort focused not only in commercial restocked areas, but also areas of specific environmental significance and areas where a reduction of species, specifically sika, has been identified. The map draws on the last five years of data and highlights that culling effort is expended in sensitive and remote areas as well as the areas of conventional productive woodland silviculture.



Please note cull locations that fall out with areas on the North of the Map represent an error in uploading to the base map.

To achieve culls, FLS use out of season authorisations, night shooting authorisations and daylight stalking. FLS also employ high seats to facilitate some static deer management in open areas.

Monitoring Methodology

- Established monitoring methods will be employed through out the duration of this LMP. In designated and sensitive sites this will play some part in informing the overall deer cull however it will not be the only aspect used to make an informed evidence based decision. Site condition Monitoring of Designated Sites will be carried out by Nature Scot. Please refer to their sitelink service for up to date information.
- Restocks are surveyed routinely through informal impact assessments and SDA's by staff, to determine the percentage of herbivore impact to saplings. This in turn allows FLS to determine the trend in herbivore impacts in the LMP area. FLS' target is to achieve less than 10% of leader browsing.
- FLS assess deer densities through use of drones and cull based population modelling. This information enables FLS to set an evidence-based cull through population modelling alongside impact assessments and cull data obtained from the Wildlife Management System link to the FLS Deer Dashboard.
- Most of the data used to create this DMP can be found in FLS' Deer Dashboard. Access to the dashboard is not yet available to the public however this is due to change in the near future.

Population Modelling and Future Culls

- The Current population assessment for the whole LMP are is 17.9 Deer per 100ha,
- Population modelling has been carried out in the area by using a blended method of dung counting, direct drone counting, and evidence used from previous culls that date back to 2017.
- Population models are updated annually based on cull data collected from the previous years culling, this is then used to inform decision making for the next years cull target. Population models provide us with a estimated time frame to achieve a specific density target and in some cases this is a significant time scale.
- The current population model can be updated regularly to provide projections of where the cull is going and give FLS a projected population density for the future. However it does not include a suitable recognition of incurring deer into the area.

- Future annual culls will be based around a 10 year objective of reducing the population by an estimated 1.2 Deer per 100ha. This will reduce the overall density of Deer to a tolerable level of less than 6 deer per 100ha. Please note that this is currently an estimation based on a cull only population and will be revised annually.
- The cull will be monitored closely and is likely to be sustained at a high level through the duration of the LMP. This reflects the population of Sika deer present in the area. As populations of deer decrease throughout the LMP timeframe the annual overall cull will also drop to reflect this. This also take into account a drop in deer numbers on neighbouring land holdings due to the area coming under a NS priority Zone. (See Bibliography)
- NN surveys will not be used to inform the cull, however FLS staff will carry out HIA,s over the course of the LMP to assist in informing the WRM. This will only take place when staff have been appropriately trained.

Protection Options – cull/fence/tubes

- In addition to culling, certain tree species in vulnerable locations may be protected with tubes or small enclosures.
- A mix of deer and stock fencing of varying age and quality are found throughout the LMP area. There are no longer any serviceable lengths of internal fencing in the area. New and replacement march fencing when undertaken is typically at a 50/50 contribution between FLS and neighbouring landowners. These fences are surveyed and monitored on a regular basis by both landowners and any novel, observed deer intrusions are dealt with through culling.
- Currently FLS has no specific intention of erecting any new lengths of deer fencing in the area.
- FLS has the ability to employ a specific clause in contract resource to respond to significant deer incursion at short notice.

Meeting objectives

- Currently, culling is carried out by and Contractor Ranger resource.
- Specific Local Objectives are discussed in detail with Contract culling and FLS Ranger resource.
- The deer culling contract offers the ability for FLS to respond to deer incursions in the within a swift time scale.
- There are no Recreational Deer Management Permissions within the DMP/LMP area.
- Both 5.6 (out of Season) and 18.2 (night shooting) authorisations are used to meet objectives. Night shooting takes place from the 1st of September to the end of March. Male deer are shot throughout the year and female deer only shot from 1st of September to the 31st of March.
- All deer controllers are qualified to DSC Level 2.
- All controllers undertake refresher training and undertake an annual practical based skills test, to ensure skills and knowledge of legislation is kept up to date and FLS are satisfied they meet their minimum marksmanship standards.

Infrastructure

- The LMP area has extensive road access and there are substantial open areas, early restocks and clearfelled areas to cull/control deer. There are also significant high forest areas where deer can be seen easily under the canopy and dispatched. Restocked areas will continue to require ATV/ pedestrian access to enable stalking, culling and extraction of carcasses. Ongoing roadside vegetation control is required to enable safe and successful night shooting operations.
- Where possible all existing access routes and ATV tracks should be maintained and not damaged during routine forestry operations in the area.
- In some circumstances it is beneficial for foresters to consult with wildlife staff to discuss the inclusion of new tracks into areas of the forest that may otherwise present complicated access issues.
- There are significant renewable energy projects situated within the LMP area – and powerline wayleaves, that improve access in some areas.

Collaborative working opportunities

- The LMP area has three main forest blocks that have neighbouring boundaries with several different landowners. These include sporting estates, a rewilding estates, numerous agricultural smallholdings and larger agricultural enterprises.
- Collaborative working to reduce deer densities in the area would be beneficial to both FLS and other landowners. FLS are open to discussion of wildlife management with neighbouring landowners including how we may work together to further reduce overgrazing by herbivores in the LMP area, specifically the reduction of overall numbers of Sika deer.
- FLS currently engages proactively with several local estates and local land owners on wildlife management issues.
- FLS is also committed to working with other agencies to promote collaboration, specifically in regards to wildlife management.

Deer Management Group representation

The LMP area partially sits within an established DMG, cull data is provided to the Monadhliath Deer Management Group annually. FLS are currently in regular contact with neighbouring landowners, as part of Night Shooting Authorisation and Out of Season Authorisation FLS will let neighbouring landowners know about their intended cull for the year. This DMP has also been submitted to the group as part of the wider scoping of the LMP.

Venison Production

- FLS subscribe to the Scottish Quality Wild Venison Assurance scheme (SQWV)
- All venison is quality assured and the vast majority of carcasses are sold to game dealer Highland Game. However, FLS will sell whole carcasses in the skin to the general public if requested.
- Inchnacardoch & Inshriach Deer larders are used to process the FLS deer carcasses culled in the LMP area.
- FLS carry out compliance checks on Ranger and Contract deer cullers to ensure food safety standards are being met.