Deer Management Plan (DMP) – Dalrulzion

Background

**Dalrulzion Forest lies within the Glen Shee area.**

The LMP area consists of one forest block of 365 ha.

The Forest consists of commercial conifer, Scots Pine, Sitka Spruce, and larch with areas of birch and native broadleaves planted along the riparian areas.

National & Local objectives

* 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/)

What are we going to protect?

* To allow the establishment of a selection of diverse species including an increased element of Broadleaves.
* To achieve less than 10% damage to leaders on all commercial restocks
* Enable a wide range of tree species to be planted successfully along the water courses to protect and improve water quality.
* Reduce the deer population within the fenced enclosures to zero.
* Control other herbivores within the enclosures and across the wider LMP area to allow the FLS target of less than 10% damage to leader shoots to be achieved.
* Protect the SAC and prevent any damage resulting from herbivores, browsing or trampling.

Deer Species (and other herbivores)

* Red, Roe and Fallow Deer are all present within the forest and in the surrounding area.
* The surrounding area lies out with any Deer management Group so there is no NatureScot count data available.
* There is an extremely transient deer population within the Glen Shee-Strathardle area with red deer in numbers of up to 100 regularly accessing the land surrounding Dalrulzion and at times entering the forest.
* At present there are no reports of rabbits or hares within the forest.

What have we done to date?

Deer culls from Dalrulzion

Table 1 - Deer Cull data

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Year | Red | Roe | Fallow | Total |
| 2021 | 29 | 36 | 20+1 Sika | 86 |
| 2022 | 34 | 40 | 17 | 91 |
| 2023 | 22 | 34 | 17 | 73 |
| 2024 | 52 | 48 | 13 | 113 |

* This has primarily been achieved using Deer Culling contractors.
* Accurate cull setting based on population modeling cull data in Dalrulzion has proved challenging, with such a considerable movement of deer during certain times of the year and certain weather conditions means the deer population can vary enormously

Impacts

* The 2016 NN survey recorded 3% damage by deer.
* 2019 NN survey recorded 25% damage by deer.

Fencing

* The Dalrulzion Forest has a perimeter stock fence which varies in condition.
* A robust fence maintenance program will be required as there have at times been large numbers of sheep accessing the forest particularly at the western edge. Working in conjunction with the neighbouring properties.
* External Deer fencing on neighbouring landholdings for woodland establishment has altered deer movement and in one area does provide a barrier for any deer wishing to enter the forest.
* There will be a requirement to fence palatable broad leaves to ensure establishment, based on the transient deer population.

Geography

* The terrain within the Dalrulzion area is primarily upland hill farmland and scrubby low hill ground.

Evidence-based approach

* Cull setting within this LMP is extremely challenging, due in principle to the substantial transient deer population. There are huge variances in the number of deer utilizing the FLS land with regular movements of hundreds of red deer.
* By looking at the previous cull data along with information from the recently formed Strathardle deer group (unofficial) there is a drive within all local stakeholders to drastically reduce the red deer population.
* There is no recent EDU data
* Regular deer surveys will be carried out by FLS staff utilizing a drone to provide regular count data which will help with planning future cull targets.

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.
* All data obtained are then combined as best possible and applied to a population model which is used to set culls.
* The Dalrulzion LMP area currently falls within the Blackcraig DMU population models, but this will be updated to show Dalrulzion as a separate DMU.
* The models are used to ascertain a recommended cull for the overall area with individual forest blocks, browsing impact and WMS data being used to support the distribution of cull targets to the forest blocks within the model area.
* At present a minimum cull figure has been set of 85 for Dalrulzion which will be monitored and reviewed depending on immigration into the forest.

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.
* Deer fencing to allow the establishment of young trees.
* Small fenced enclosures to protect clusters of trees for seed source and riverbank stabilization.
* Tubes for isolated pockets of native hardwoods where they are best suited

How will objectives be met?

* The Dalrulzion LMP area will be managed by using both Wildlife Ranger staff and Deer Management Contract staff
* All controllers are qualified to Deer Stalking Certificate levels 1 & 2. In addition, all are required to carry out an annual firearms skills test, ensuring the highest levels of safety and competency when undertaking their duties.
* Wildlife Contractors are a vital resource in FLS’ s 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 compliance, and H&S 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) authorisations on application to NatureScot for un-enclosed woodland. Male deer of all species will be shot 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 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 otherwise 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 the guides will be issued to Wildlife Rangers and Contractors 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.

 Roads/ATV tracks/glades/larders/equipment

* Infrastructure and access within the LMP area is minimal and will need to be improved. which will be challenging to maintain and keep clear due to a combination of windblow and considerable regen. 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 (The availability of hand cutters), however, the future 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 is involved in planning so that open areas can be maintained as much as possible.
* 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.
* There are two Deer larders which are used, The Formal larder, capacity 55 deer which is situated North of Alyth, the other larder is at Tummel Bridge which has a capacity 120 deer. Both are in excellent condition and maintained to an extremely high standard.

Collaborative Working

* FLS have recently engaged with the Strathardle deer group and shared information on deer movements within the group.

Deer Management Groups

* The LMP area is not within any official Deer Management group.

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.