Appendix 9 - Deer Management Plan (DMP)

Background

This DMP is a supporting document/appendix to the Achnashellach Long Term Plan (LTP) 2026-2036. It also relates to, and 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 of this DMP is *further reduction of a well-established wild deer population in the area*. FLS is committed to reducing the overall deer density in the LTP 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 LTP (section 1.1.4). Most relevant for deer management are:-

- Continue landscape-scale restoration of native woodland - a 50-year restructuring process started in 2015 - *to conserve, expand and connect fragmented native woodland habitat*.
- Protect water quality and enhance associated riparian habitat of river Carron, its wider catchment and upstream tributaries.

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 consider 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 can lead to tree mortality whilst at the same time the restoration objectives of the LTP are increasing variety of age classes across the landholding which is increasing extent of suitable 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 LTP to meet its objectives.

Key habitat and woodland types within the LTP area requiring deer management to succeed are:

- Areas of CPI (i.e. Caledonian pinewood) restoration and adjacent areas prescribed for native woodland restructuring (by both natural regeneration and restocking) to develop inter-connectivity of these CPI zones. In particular, the LTP has extensive areas of fallowing and broadleaf-regenerating terrain south of the river Carron where reduction of *overall* deer density, coupled with focussed cull effort on areas monitored as having greatest browsing impact, will ultimately support establishment success of these woodland areas.
- New areas of peatland restoration proposed within the Long Term Plan.
- PAWS areas – now largely clear-felled of non-native afforestation - with veteran, indigenous trees, shrubs and associated ground flora and lower plants.

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)

Deer species present in this area are Red, Sika and Roe deer. Red currently make up the majority of the deer population, with Sika 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.

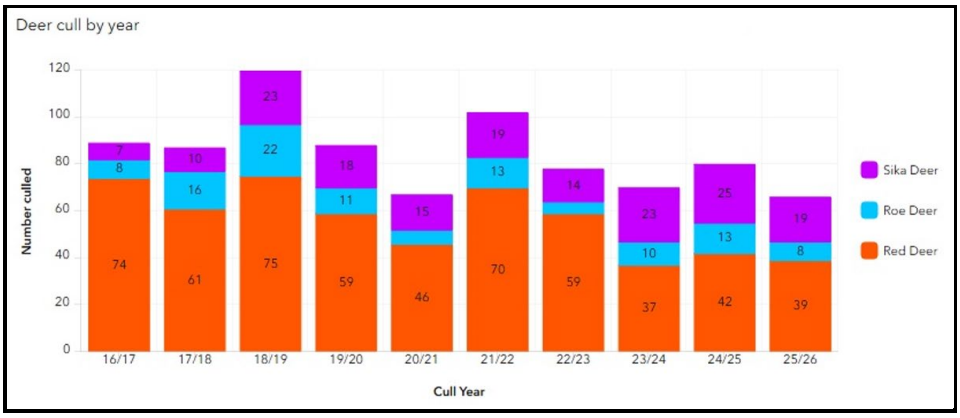
There are no populations of other herbivores i.e. rabbits, hares, feral wild goats or pigs established in the LTP area. Within the strath, there are several livestock grazing fields (neighbouring third party-owned or tenanted croft ground). Any incursions onto FLS land could potentially impact upon LTP objectives. In such instances, the FLS Wildlife Ranger Manager and local ranger would work with the specific agricultural enterprises, and the Department of Agriculture, to ensure major incursions are dealt with swiftly.

Historic Deer Management

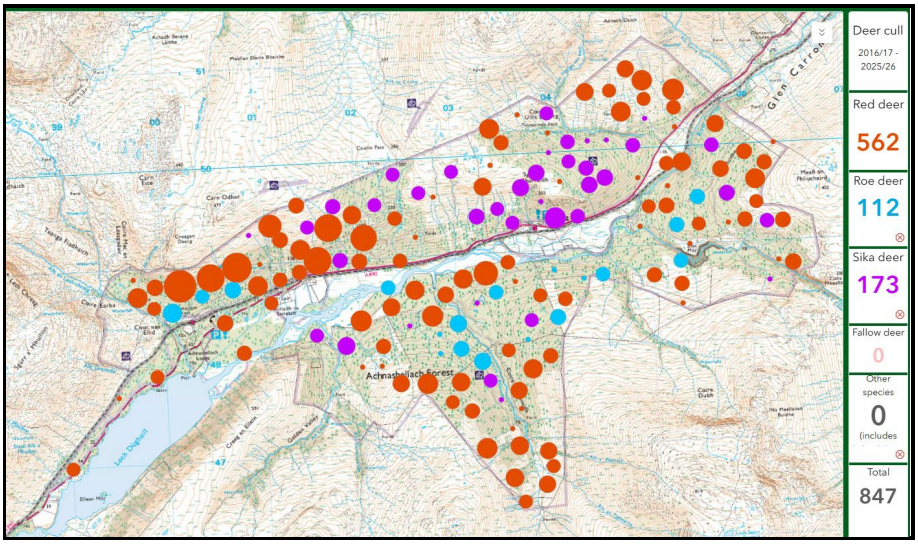
To achieve culls, FLS use out of season authorisations, night shooting authorisations and daylight stalking and use a local FLS wildlife ranger and the services of a Nature Scot wildlife ranger to achieve this.

Over the last ten years, FLS have overseen a targeted average annual cull of 85 deer - inclusive of all species (see 'Population Modelling' below for underpinning rationale). 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.

Deer cull (all species): 2016 – 2026



Historic cull locations are illustrated on the following map and shows effort focused not only in commercial restocked areas, but also remote areas and ones of specific environmental significance or sensitivity between 2016 and 2026.



Monitoring Methodology

- Established monitoring methods will be employed throughout the duration of this LTP. 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.
- Restock and Regeneration areas are surveyed routinely through herbivore impact assessments and Stocking Density Assessment, to determine the percentage of browsing damage to saplings. This in turn allows FLS to determine the trend in deer impacts in the LTP area. FLS' target is to achieve less than 10% of leader browsing.
- When impact is deemed at an unacceptable level, concise and targeted efforts of deer control will be implemented swiftly by FLS staff to bring damage down to acceptable levels following strict FLS policy.
- FLS assess deer densities through use of drones or dung count surveys conducted by an independent third party. 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 FLS' Wildlife Management Dashboard. Drone counting provides a snapshot of deer numbers on the day of survey but due to the transient nature of the deer population the number fluctuates regularly.
- 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

- 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 year's cull target. Population models provide an estimated deer number that must be present to achieve a previous year's cull. They are based upon recruitment rates of female deer of all three major species in the area.
- Deer numbers were assessed in 2022 by dung count survey to give deer density estimates of 6.6/km^2 in the northern half of the LTP area and 8.8/km^2 in the southern half. The 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 this does not include recognition of incurring deer. At LTP revision (spring 2026), the resident density of deer (all species) is estimated at below 5/km^2 (northside) and below 4/km^2 (southside), i.e. a significant decrease on 2022 levels, however Immigration now makes up at least 50% of the cull which is demonstrated in the male-dominated cull numbers.
- The proposed annual cull is based on figures derived from these resident deer population estimates and incurring deer will be added to the proposed cull.
- Annual cull density (all deer) for 2022-2024 period was 6.01/km^2 for the north (37 deer p.a.) and 3.99/km^2 in the south (37 deer p.a.) i.e. a total 72 deer p.a.. If FLS continue to sustain female culling at this rate, FLS contend that the populations will be brought down even further to the benefit of regeneration woodland.
- The cull is and will be monitored closely and is likely to be sustained at this high level through the duration of the LTP. This reflects the population of Sika deer in particular present and incurring into (often through) the LTP area.
- The cull target was 75 deer per annum for 2024/25 and 2025/26 with 80 and 66 deer actually culled in those years respectively. The 26/27 target is 85 – to account for cull shortfall in the previous year.

Protection Options – cull/fence/tubes

- In addition to culling, certain tree species in vulnerable locations may be protected with tubes or small enclosures although currently no tubes or enclosures are used.
- A mix of deer and stock fencing of varying age and quality are found on the perimeter of the LTP 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 stock or deer fencing in the area.

Meeting objectives

- Currently, culling is carried out by both FLS Wildlife Staff and a Nature Scot Ranger.
- Specific Local Objectives are discussed in detail with both the NatScot and FLS Ranger resource.
- There are no Recreational Deer Management Permissions within the DMP/LTP 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 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 LTP area has a relatively effective network of forest 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.

Collaborative working opportunities

- The LTP area shares boundaries with three estate landowners. These include a sporting estate and two estates with neighbouring native woodland establishment and management objectives.
- FLS remain open to discussion of wildlife management with neighbouring landowners including how we may work together to further reduce overgrazing by herbivores in the LTP area.
- FLS is also committed to working with other agencies to promote collaboration, specifically in regards to wildlife management.

Deer Management Group representation

The Achnashellach LTP area is located within two DMG catchments: South Ross DMG (for FLS land south of the Carron river) and South West Ross (north of the Carron river). Through the auspices of these DMGs, FLS maintain regular contact with neighbouring landowners, as part of Night Shooting Authorisation and Out of Season Authorisation as well as in declaration of their intended annual cull. Both groups were notified of the commencement of the LTP revision process (May 2025) and invited to make any pertinent comments or feedback on historic, or circulated draft future, management of the landholding. They were also notified of FLS' final submission of the new draft LTP to Scottish Forestry (October 2026) in order that they may make further or final comment as part of the forestry regulator's Plan approvals process.

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.
- FLS carry out compliance checks on Ranger and Contract deer cullers to ensure food safety standards are being met.