



## Appendix VI

# Deer Management Plan (DMP) – Fleet Basin

## Background

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

## National & Local objectives

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

Fleet Basin lies within the Galloway Main block Deer Management unit.

Objectives are summarized as:

- *Protect the SNFE from unacceptable impacts by deer; (Less than 10% leader browsing damage by deer on all P1 to P5 year coupes. Minimize Bark stripping & fraying to all crop ages.)*
- *Aim for total deer densities to be in the range of 3-7 deer/km<sup>2</sup>*
- *All biological resources on the SFE are protected from the negative impacts of browsing/grazing herbivores. This includes all tree crops, Sites of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI's), Planted Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) Low Impact Silvicultural Systems (LISS), National Nature Reserves (NNR) and other locally designated areas;*
- *Meet the tree stocking density targets per hectare.*
- *Contractor and authorized controllers ensure good relationships with members of the public, other Forestry customers and Forestry Land Scotland staff.*

## What are we going to protect?

The Fleet Basin forest block has been and continues to be a commercial forest block with Sitka Spruce being the predominant tree species. Large Areas of SSSI can be found to the East & West, some of which is within the North Western Forest block area. To the South west the Forest block is directly adjacent to Nature Scots NNR which is also SSSI. Existing and future plans will see an increase of tree diversity with the addition of Mixed Broadleaves along riparian zones and mosaic tree edges and soft conifer species such as Norway Spruce on suitable soil types. In addition to this there are some areas of Deep peat located within the block which are possible considerations for peatland restoration projects. This will lead to increased biodiversity within the block and will require an increased & Ongoing requirement to protect the biodiversity within the area as well as commercial crop protection.

## Deer Species (and other herbivores/feral pigs)

Red and Roe Deer are found throughout the Fleet Basin Block.

Roe are the predominant species however the Nature Scot NNR to the West is resident to a number of Red Deer that annually subjects the Fleet Basin to Red Deer immigration.

There is a Goat heft resident on the Cairnsmore of Fleet hill range to the West which can access the Fleet Basin block. Goats are able to breach the perimeter stock fencing and enter the forest most commonly during the winter months and periods of adverse weather.

Occasionally sheep trespass occurs. These instances have reduced greatly in recent years with any new reports acted upon and removed as and when reported.

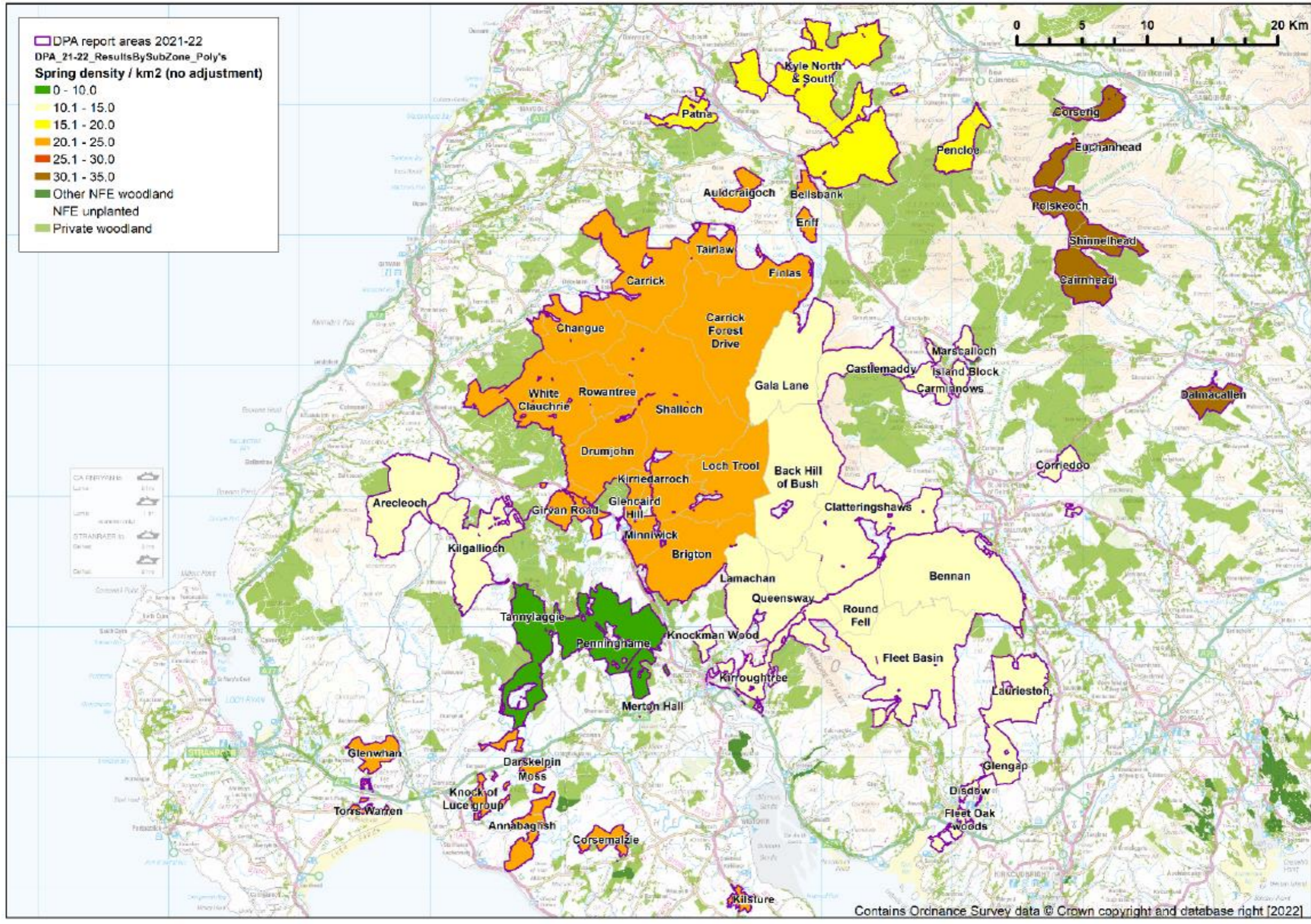
## What have we done to date?

- Strath Caulaidh Spring Mean deer densities for 2021-22 were reported to be circa 10 – 15 /km<sup>2</sup>. ( Please see map below). Given the +/- 42.8% confidence figure they quote in their report , FLS are confident that the true density is at the lower end of the confidence giving a **SPRING POPULATION of 5 Roe /km<sup>2</sup> & 2 Red /km<sup>2</sup>. (Totaling 7/km<sup>2</sup>)**

Culling is ongoing with culls set based on population modeling and Cull data / evidence.

To achieve the above densities, using a mix of Deer culling contracts & FLS Staff, FLS have culled **414 Red deer & 1039 Roe Deer** over the last full 5 years (April 2017 to April 22).

In addition, **286** goats have been culled by FLS from the Cairnsmore Goat heft over the same period. *(Some of these Goats will have been culled from within other forest blocks but for recording purposes, they are all recorded against the Cairnsmore of Fleet Goat Heft area.)*

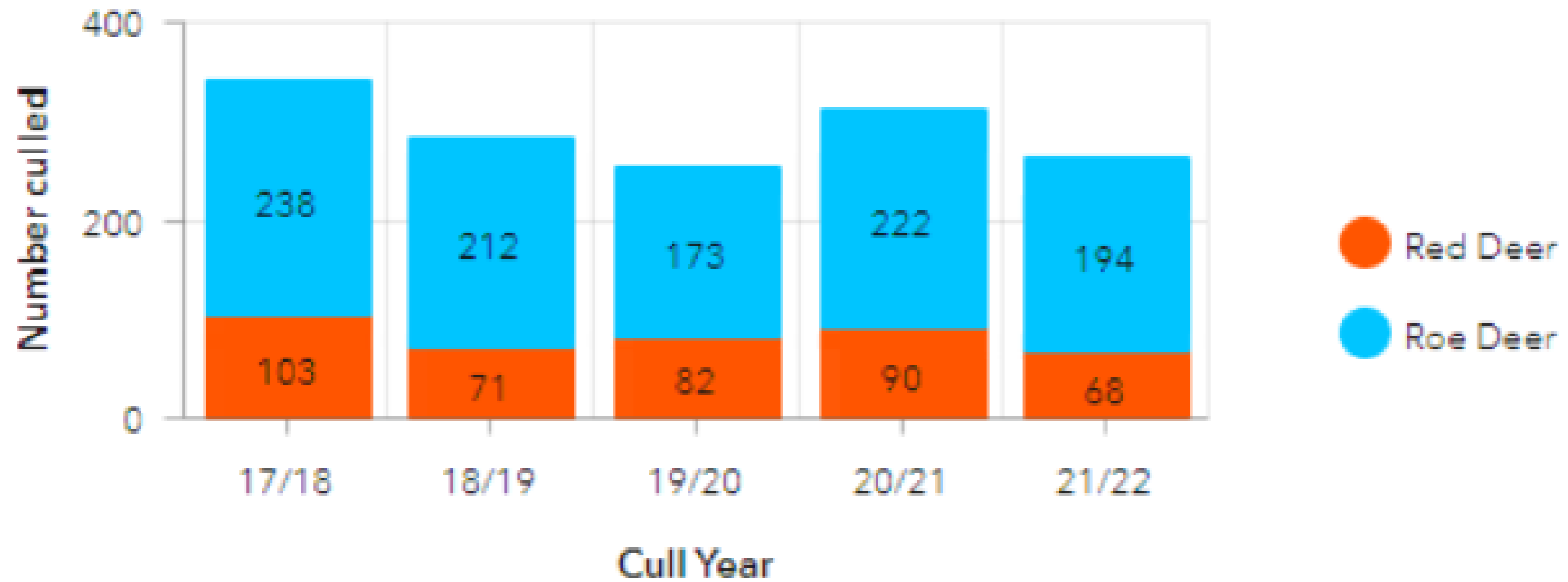


Overview Map of 2021-22

Deer Density's

Deer cull charts are as below.

## Deer cull by year

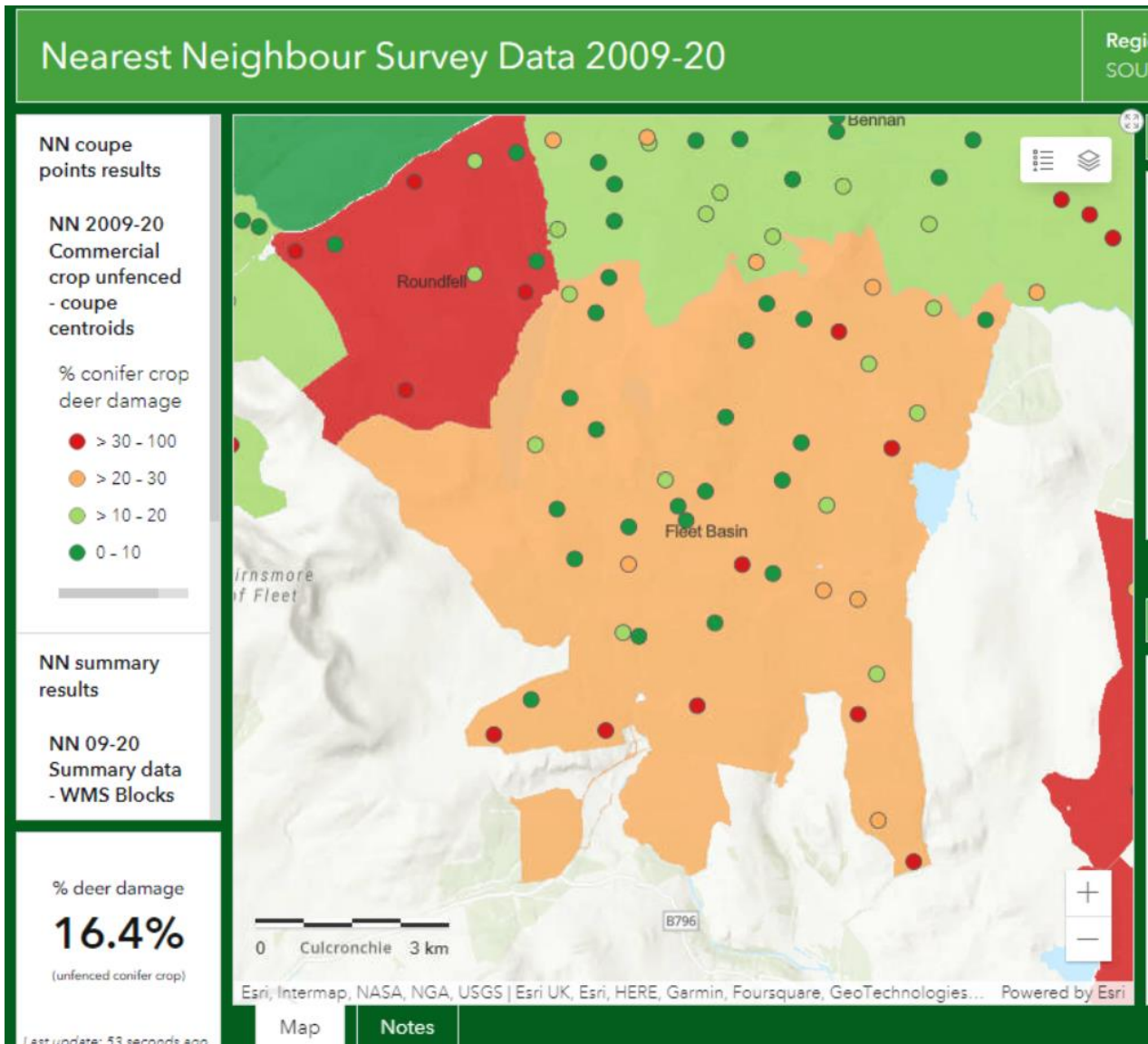


*Filter: Main deer species = Y*

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Nearest Neighbour (NN) Impact assessment results below.



Many of the previous NN impact surveys have found the commercial crop leader loss to be within acceptable limits, however there are still instances where herbivore impacts are expected to be problematic, such as areas known for Feral goat intrusion or within small confined areas of restock planted with palatable tree species.

## Geography

- The terrain within Fleet Basin is upland hill, which varies from peaty slopes to steep rocky terrain on the Southern face of Craig Ronald hill in the furthest North Western area. An extensive network of forest roads and ATV tracks aid access to the area and makes extraction of deer possible for the most part.

## Have an evidence based approach

FLS use an information based decision making process to set its deer management operations with the data received from various internal and external reports that include;

- Thermal drone counts
- Herbivore dung counts
- Historical cull data
- Sighting data
- Ranger daily/monthly reports
- Deer Management Contractor daily/monthly reports
- Helicopter counts
- WRM surveys
- 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.

## Link to Deer Dashboard

- Most of the data used to create this DMP can be found in the Deer Dashboard, Currently only available to FLS staff, however it will be made available to public soon.

## Population Modeling and Future Culls

The Fleet Basin Forest block falls within the Galloway South East population model. The Models are used to ascertain a recommended cull for a greater area, with Cull & Impact data used to support the distribution of culls to the forest blocks within the model area.

For the next 5 year period the Deer cull for the Fleet Basin block is set to be circa.

- 200 Roe
- 70 Red

To ensure sustainability Feral Goats will be culled within the Fleet basin forest block on an opportunistic basis and recorded as under The “Cairnsmore of Fleet Goat heft”.

The wider population of the “Cairnsmore of Fleet Goat heft” is, in collaboration with NatureScot, assessed every 5 years via a helicopter census count.

The next census count is due in September 2023.

## How will objectives be met? Staff, contractor?

- Fleet Basin plan area will be / is currently managed by a mixture of FLS Wildlife Ranger staff & Wildlife Contractor. Contractual agreement keeps contractors and rangers from sharing areas so designated beats of the Fleet Basin have been assigned to each controller type.
- 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 Rangers also complete additional self-checklists and training at set intervals that are part of the resumption system. FLS Wildlife Rangers are supported by a Wildlife Ranger Manager and Area Wildlife Manager.
- Wildlife Contractors are a vital resource in FLS' s deer management tool box. 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) authorization 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 February to the 31st 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 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 held at the district office and issued to Wildlife Rangers 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.

## Infrastructure? Roads/ATV tracks/glades/larders/equipment

- Infrastructure and access within Fleet Basin is well developed and continually assessed against deer density data. New infrastructure is installed at the restock stage and foresters consult with the wildlife team to decide the best location for access tracks. At this time no new access is required to achieve the culls within the Fleet Basin block but there will be some areas to the that will require future consideration due to terrain and Deer species present.



- Natural regeneration in deer glades and ATV tracks restricts wildlife management access. Future plans for the block involve infrastructure maintenance which will restore access and shooting opportunities. Requirements will be addressed by the FLS Wildlife team as part of the work planning process for individual sites.
- Flailing of the road's edge can increase visibility of deer during culling operations vegetation clearance that coincides with Civils Road maintenance programs will be explored.
- All FLS Wildlife Rangers have to 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 New Galloway Deer larder is the primary appointed Larder for this forest block. Larder capacity is 80 Red.

## Collaborative working opportunities

- Currently there are no active collaborative culling agreements in place. FLS seek to work with neighbors where there is a mutual benefit in managing herbivore populations at a landscape scale wherever possible. There is intermittent communication with the Nature Scot, adjacent land owners to the South West of the block regarding issues such Deer and Goat census counts on adjoining open hill ranges along the western edge.

## Deer Management Group presence

The Fleet Basin area falls within the Galloway & Dumfries-shire Deer Group area. The group experiences some periods of in-activity due to member commitments.

## Venison

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