



Deer Management Plan (DMP) – Minniwick

Background

- This DMP should be used as a supporting document 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
 - Minniwick is situated within the Galloway Main block Deer Management unit.

Objectives are summarized as:

- *Protect the Scottish National Forest Estate (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 2-9 deer/ km²*
- *All biological resources on the SNFE 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?

Minniwick is a very diverse forest with natural regeneration flourishing in natural reserves and PAW's areas. Over 71% of the forest area is between 3-30 years old with 36% of the high forest area planted since 2011. Some of this is a result of windblow events and sanitization felling of Larch. Fertile soils and an abundance of seed sources have increased regeneration in some areas of the crop which has increased the stocking densities.

As a result of this mixture of tree species and rotating crop structure this will present additional challenges for deer management with deer populations more likely to thrive in this type of habitat.

Deer Species

Red and Roe Deer are found throughout the Minniwick LMP area with roe being the predominant species. Fallow deer can occasionally be seen but this tends to be sporadic.

What have we done to date?

Latest deer browsing impact assessment carried out in 2020 (Nearest Neighbour method) gave results of around 17% for Soft conifers and 3% up to 59% of unprotected broadleaves suffering from leader browsing impacts for the worst affected areas. National target for all tree species is <10%.

For the 5 years 2018-2023 culls achieved have averaged 15 Roe and 5 Red deer annually.

Geography

The terrain within Minniwick is low lying and generally flat. There is an extensive network of forest roads and some ATV tracks making access to the area and carcass extraction straight forward. A public road travels through the center of the block with the Southern Upland Way Footpath also coming through part of this forest. Activity from MOP is moderate with people walking in from the nearby Glentool Village and FLS Visitor Centre on the road to Loch Trool to the North Eastern part of the forest.

Have an evidence based approach

FLS use an information based decision making process to set its deer management operations with the data received from varies internal and external reports and 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 the public soon.

Population Modeling and Future Culls

Minniwick forest block falls within the Galloway North and West population model. These models are used to ascertain a recommended cull for a greater area, with cull and impact data used to support the distribution of culls to the forest blocks within the model area.

Strath Caulaidh spring mean deer densities for 21-22 were reported to be circa 20 – 25 km². Given the +/- 42.8% confidence figure they quote in their report, FLS are confident that the current density is at the lower end of the confidence limits which would indicate a 'spring' population of around 8 Roe km² and 3 Red km² (combined 11 km²).

Based on population modeling and cull data / evidence the 2023/24 culls have been set at 6 red and 55 roe deer, culls will continue to be reviewed on an annual basis.

How will objectives be met? Staff, contractor?

Deer management is currently carried out by a Wildlife Contractor, this will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure objectives are being achieved.

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

Road access within Minniwick is good allowing access to most areas of the forest. New infrastructure will be considered at the restocking stage and foresters consult with the wildlife team to decide the best location for access tracks and deer glades.

Deer glades, Riparian zones & ATV tracks are all vital in effort to achieve deer culls. In recent years the rate of growth from natural regeneration of many tree species has created difficulties with maintaining open space and deer glades. ATV tracks have also become overgrown and difficult to locate which is not helpful for getting into any open areas to cull deer. This has been mainly to the lack of resource, particularly the availability of chainsaw operators. However, FLS has invested in flail mowing machinery which will assist with vegetation management in the future.

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 equipment as standard:

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

The Glentool Deer larder is the primary appointed Larder for this forest block. Larder capacity is 80 Red deer.

Collaborative working opportunities

There are currently no collaborative working arrangements as Minniwick is mostly surrounded by FLS land.

FLS continue to apply to Nature Scot to acquire Out of Season and Night Shooting authorization approvals.

DMG present

Minniwick is within the Galloway & Dumfries-shire Deer Group area.

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 will be removed by a licensed waste disposal contractor.

All animal by-products are sold to Highland Game along with the venison.