



Appendix 6 – Deer Management Plan (DMP) – Strathdon

Background

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

National and Local objectives

- 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 \(www.gov.scot\)](#).

The Strathdon LTP area is located to the west of Huntly and is situated within the Cairngorms National Park. The LTP area is approximately 1,986 hectares in size and is split into two blocks, known locally as the Bunzeach and Auchernoch. The elevation of Bunzeach runs from about 280 metres along the river Don, to approximately 650 meters towards the top of Mullachdubh in the south. While Auchernoch runs from about 330 metres along the Water of Nocht, to approximately 510 meters towards the top of Moss Hill in the north.

The current forest structure is a mixture of tree species, Larch, Sitka Spruce, Lodgepole pine and Scots pine with some areas where a broadleaf mixture has been planted.

What are we going to protect?

Establish areas of Caledonian pine wood type forest in upland margins and develop a successful network of riparian corridors to improve habitat connectivity within the LTP area. To support a successful, diverse commercial forest, through active thinning in appropriate areas to maximise crop quality and economic returns.

- Peat restoration
- Flood mitigation
- By the end of the plan period, broadleaf species coverage will have increased from 3% currently to at least 5%.
- Maintain open habitats.

Deer Species (and other herbivores)

- Red and Roe deer are the predominant in this area.

- The most recent EDU population assessment was in 2021 giving an estimated density of 31.6 deer/km².-However, this was a combined survey result covering a far wider area and this needs to be considered.
- There is a level of recruitment into the LTP area due to migration from neighboring land holdings. This is changeable depending on the direction of land use the surrounding estates focus on over a particular period.

The cull table below indicates transient red deer in the surrounding area, which appears to be on the increase, these will be targeted when within the Strathdon forest block, highlighting the requirement for better ATV access in key areas.

What have we done to date?

Deer culls from Strathdon

Year	Roe	Red	Total
2024	248	114	362
2023	120	41	161
2022	92	26	118
2021	115	51	166
2020	82	16	98

- The culls have been delivered using an FLS Ranger and recently Deer management contract resources.
- **Impacts**-the results from impact survey from the years 19-20-22 survey, suggest browsing of 29.87 % damage on crops over 2 sites in the Bunzeach , The last data available for Auchernoch forest block records 16.36% allocated to deer browsing from the 3 year survey average carried out in 2017,18 and 19 which if correct is high and may have been down to the site specifics at the time. With the increased culls delivered and a focus on setting the correct highest culls for the future, it is hoped the level of damage across all species will be kept low, however this will prove challenging especially with the increase in the transient red deer population.

Fencing:

- The Bunzeach has mixture of deer and stock fencing in various stages of condition. This fencing has been surveyed, and the recommendation is to renew as stock fence specification, removing any remnant deer fencing. * Sheep continue to be a major issue

and have contributed to failure in restocking. Auchernoch has a perimeter stock fence which the most crucial section being approx. 6 years old and in good condition.

- Deer fenced enclosures may be required to protect the more palatable broadleaves to allow establishment. This will be discussed with the FM team prior to any planting using the most up to date information available.

Have an evidence-based approach.

- Cull setting within this LTP is challenging, due in principle to the ingress from adjoining land. There will be increased focus along with regular use of the FLS deer team drone to survey deer numbers, with this accurate information it will enable the correct culls to be set for the future and allow the deer team to manage and reduce the deer population.

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
- Strath Caulaidh Survey data, independently obtained – i.e., Deer density figure, impacts – Nearest Neighbour (NN)/Habitat Impact Assessment (HIA), Stocking Density Assessment (SDA), etc.
- All data obtained is then applied to a population model which is used to help set the correct cull.

Deer Dashboard

- Data used to create this DMP can be found in the FLS Deer Dashboard.

Population Modeling and Future Culls

- The minimum culls are set in the table below This figure is a result of looking at survey information, population modelling and considering local deer movements and the forest plans.

Year	Roe	Red	Total
2025	235	65	300
2026	210	70	280

- The future cull planning and deer management may require flexibility to provide the crop protection required.
- The cull set will be challenging to reach with the current access and structure of the forest and a programme to open access-rides and open space along with crucial ATV tracks must be planned and delivered, to allow future culls to be met providing the crop protection required.

Protection Options – cull/fence/tubes

- A robust approach to culling will take place across the LTP to continue to reduce the background deer population and target sensitive areas. Culls will be regularly monitored, reviewed, and changed when required to ensure a proactive approach is taken with the deer management to ensure crop success is achieved.
- Enclosure Fencing to protect and ensure the increase in Broadleaves are met will be considered.

How will objectives be met

- Maintain a deer population of between 2 and 5 per km².
- Maintain a robust approach to sheep ingress and deal with this effectively, engaging with stock owners, maintain fences within the LTP area to allow the FLS target of less than 10% damage to leader shoots to be achieved.

The Strathdon LTP area will be managed by using the Wildlife Ranger staff and Deer Management Contract resources.

- All controllers are qualified to Deer Stalking Certificate levels 1 & 2. They also undertake an annual firearms skills test, ensuring the highest levels of safety and competency when undertaking their duties.
- Deer management contractors are a vital resource in FLS' s deer management toolbox which are selected after satisfying FLS of their competence via a competitive tender. All Deer Management Contractors must meet the FLS standards of health and safety, compliance and be trained to the level of deer management like that of the FLS wildlife staff.
- 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 culled through the 12 months of the year on FLS land. Females will be culled under license from the 1st of September to the 31st of March When early out of season culling of females is conducted any dependent young will be culled 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. 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 LTP area is well developed but proves challenging to maintain and keep clear due to a combination of track side vegetation and considerable regen. 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.
- Open areas, green ride networks have grown over with regen in recent years which has led to less open areas to shoot deer. This has been due to the lack of resource (The availability of hand cutters), however, the plans for this LTP 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.
- Efficient deer control cannot be undertaken without clear access along all forest roads and ride systems this requires the clearing of these areas to become a priority.
- New infrastructure must be planned and installed at the restock stage and foresters consult with the wildlife team to decide the best location for access tracks. This provides an opportunity for improving culling infrastructure surrounding the vulnerable areas enabling more effective crop protection to be conducted.

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 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 caliber rifles
- Binoculars.
- Handheld thermal imager to increase herbivore detection.
- Various knives, saws, and PPE.
- Access to thermal drone and pilot.
- The main Deer Larder for the Strathdon LTP area is situated at Bennachie-Tillyfourie, AB51 7SQ.

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.