



Appendix 8

Deer Management Plan (DMP)– Assich, Laiken & Ferness

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

- Local objectives can be found in the LMP. Most relevant for deer management are the increased levels of broadleaves and increased variety in age. The broadleaves will be susceptible to damage and the larger variety in age class of the forest might provide better shelter which could hamper management. Deer numbers will need to be at a level to facilitate successful establishment of palatable species for this plan to succeed. For this plan area the objective is less than 10% browsing damage in restocks at P1 in Nearest Neighbour impact assessments.
- 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 \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

What are we going to protect?

This Deer Management Plan is required to manage the deer population in a sustainable way whilst protecting and establishing the local forest management objectives and achieving Forestry and Land Scotland national objectives.

Deer Species (and other herbivores/feral pigs)

The predominant deer species are Roe and Red deer. Sika deer have been shot on rare occasions. FLS have had no reports of other herbivores in the DMP area.

There are significant numbers of livestock surrounding the forests that would impact upon the objectives of the LMP if there were serious incursions into the area. The local Wildlife Ranger Manager (WRM) and supervisor will work with local agricultural enterprises to make sure that any major incursions are dealt with swiftly.

What have we done to date?

Historic Cull: in the previous 5 years FLS have produced an average cull of 127 deer per annum.

To achieve historic culls we have used out of season authorisations, night shooting authorisations and daylight stalking. We have also employed the use of high seats to facilitate some static deer management in open areas. See table below for details of the cull figures over the three forests.

Table 1. Deer cull for Assich, Laiken and Ferness for last 5 years:

Year	Assich	Ferness	Laiken	Total for year
2018	49	53	32	134
2019	41	33	26	100
2020	57	49	18	124
2021	57	34	16	107
2022	110	36	27	173
Total	314	205	119	638

P1 restocks have been surveyed by a third party using Nearest Neighbour impact assessments. There have been no surveys in the last 5 years to establish deer browsing levels.

Monitoring Methodology

P1 restocks are surveyed annually through Nearest Neighbour (NN) impact assessments as well as ongoing internal restock surveying, to determine the percentage of browsing damage to saplings. This in turn allows FLS to determine the trends in deer damage in the LMP area and alter cull levels accordingly.

FLS will obtain up-to-date deer population densities by way of drone/dung count surveys carried out by an independent third party. This information will enable FLS to set an evidence-based cull through population modelling alongside impact assessments and cull data obtained from the Wildlife Management System.

The environment team undertakes Herbivore Impact Assessments (HIA) and inputs the data into the Deer Dashboard which is used by all teams involved in site restocking.

Most of the data used to create this DMP can be found in the Deer Dashboard. Access to the dashboard is not yet available to the general public however this will change in the near future.

Population Modeling and Future Culls

FLS use population modelling, herbivore impact results and site condition monitoring to inform current and future cull targets. Culling may be adjusted throughout the year according to

low/high browsing impacts as appropriate. Culling aims to achieve a population density of <5 deer per km² and <10% leader damage on all conifer P1 restock.

Given the ongoing culling level by the FLS Wildlife team and neighbouring deer managers the deer population is believed to be stable and this is borne out by forest objectives being met.

Until North Region carry out an up-to-date deer population assessment, annual culls will be set against browsing impacts in order to deliver restocking and natural regeneration objectives.

Our proposed cull for 2022/23 for the whole of the LMP area is 200 animals, carried out by a mix of contract and ranger resource. If P1 surveys indicate that cull levels need to be increased, additional resources will be allocated to this.

Protection Options – cull/fence/tubes

In addition to culling, certain tree species in vulnerable locations will be protected with tubes.

A mix of deer and stock fencing of varying age and quality are found throughout the LMP area.

There are no internal deer fences in the LMP area but there are some rabbit proof stock fences within the forest at Ferness.

March fencing is a 50/50 contribution between FLS and neighbouring landowners. These are surveyed and monitored on a regular basis by both landowners and any deer intrusions are dealt with through culling.

How will objectives be met? Staff, contractor?

- At this time the culling is carried out by contractor and staff resource in the LMP area.
- There are no Recreational Deer Management Permissions within the DMP/LMP 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 DSC 2 qualified.
- Additional deer control can be brought in at short notice if required

Geography

- The terrain type encountered in the DMP and surrounding area is classed as Lowland Agricultural with a woodland mix. (See Appendix 1 for more information)

Infrastructure

- The LMP area has significant roaded access and there are open areas as well as restock and clearfell areas to cull/ control deer. There are also significant high forest areas where deer can be seen and dispatched. Restock areas will continue to require ATV/ pedestrian access to enable stalking into deer, culling and extraction of carcasses. Ongoing roadside vegetation will be 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 may be beneficial to consult with wildlife staff to discuss the inclusion of new tracks into areas of the forest that may present access issues.
- Land to the south of Ferness has been identified for the development of a new windfarm. Disturbance to the area whilst it is being constructed may cause an ingress of deer into the forest.

Collaborative working opportunities

The surrounding area to the forest is mainly agricultural with little or no deer sporting interest although there is recreational deer stalking activity taking place around the forest boundary.

- Ferness – A neighbour has expressed some concern over deer leaching out from the forest onto their adjacent land holding. This may be an opportunity to approach them about collaborative working to control the deer on their ground.
- Ferness – A neighbouring estate with forestry interests has previously expressed an interest in working together over specific management issues. This may be an opportunity to open a dialogue with them about deer management on a wider scale in the area.

DMG present

The LMP doesn't fall into a Deer Management Group area. This is currently being considered for the future. We will continue to work with neighbours where this is necessary.

Venison

- FLS subscribe to the Scottish Quality Wild Venison (SQWV) scheme.
- All venison is quality assured and sold to Highland Game.
- The Inshriach Larder is used for carcasses from Assich, Laiken and Ferness.