

SOUTH PERTSHIRE DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

MARCH 2016 DRAFT

**DEER MANAGEMENT
PLAN
2016 – 2025
Working Plan**

PREFACE

This Deer Management Plan has been developed for the South Perthshire Deer Management Group (SPDMG). The Plan is funded both by the deer group and by Scottish Natural Heritage, it runs from 2016 until 2025 and has been formally endorsed by all the Members of the Group. It replaces a previous plan from 2010 which only covered part of the area. It has been designed to be readily updated as needs arise and will be reviewed on a six-monthly basis or as required, with a systematic review taking place at the end of the first five year period in 2020.

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OPERATION OF THE GROUP

Area & Boundaries

Action Points

- 1.1 Endorse Aberuchil Estate and Perth & Kinross Council as members of the Group in spring 2016, and add in Dalchonzie as an additional reporting unit for SMH Holdings who are already a Group member.
- 1.2 During summer 2016, work with SNH and others to develop options for extending the DMG boundary across the A9.
- 1.3 Adopt the new proposed sub- area structure within the Group area at Spring 2016 meeting.

Membership

Action Point

- 2.1 During spring 2016, recruit the above mentioned properties (in main document) as Reporting Members of SPDMG.
- 2.2 Collate 2015-16 cull data for these properties, and add them to the SNH statutory return database.

Meetings

Action Points

- 3.1 As above, look to encourage wider community participation, including invitations to community councils to attend meetings from this spring onwards. All such groups to be given the opportunity to contribute to the agenda of meetings.
- 3.2 Group to consider options for extension to the east, one aim of this being to secure potential office bearers for the eastern sub- area. Personnel to make this sub- area work are lacking at present.

Constitution & Finances

Action Points

- 4.1 A constitution to be adopted at Spring 2016 group meeting.

Deer Management Plan

Action Points

- 5.1 Endorse DMP at spring 2016 meeting following consultation on the draft plan.
- 5.2 Ensure a system of communications is in place whereby local interests have access to the plan, and can input to future development of it. To achieve this, the Plan will be published on a dedicated DMG website. The ethos behind this plan is that it will be regularly updated, perhaps twice a year, and therefore it is impracticable to circulate hard copies of the plan.

Code of Practice on Deer Management

Action Points

6.1 *Ensure adherence to code at all times, both by the Group, and by individual members.*

6.2 *At all subsequent meetings, group members will have the opportunity to raise any issues relating to deer welfare issues or other problems that they are aware about within the Group. In all cases, members are encouraged to bring the issue up with those responsible in the first instance, or to seek the advice of the Group Chairman.*

Data & Evidence gathering- Deer Counts

Action Points

9.1 *Group to extend counting practice to cover all members by spring 2017.*

9.2 *If possible, look to undertake another helicopter count within the period of this plan.*

9.3 *Group members need to carry out thorough and consistent recruitment counts on an annual basis to inform the population model. Such counts should take place in the final week of April/ first week of May, and the recruitment % is the no. of calves expressed as a proportion of the no. of hinds, two years or older.*

Data & Evidence Gathering- Culls

Action Point

10.1 *Update the population models and target culls on an annual basis, using recruitment and mortality data collected, as well as actual culls from the previous year.*

10.2 *All cull data to be collated at end of season promptly, and forwarded to all members well in advance of spring meeting.*

10.3 *Cull data to include fallow and sika deer, and to include data from new members and reporting members.*

10.4 *Cull summary to reflect new sub- area structure*

10.5 *Cull summaries to be obtained from potential new members on other side of the A9.*

Data & Evidence Gathering- Habitat Monitoring

Action Points

11.1 *A schedule of habitat and designated site monitoring will be provided in the Working Plan.*

11.2 *The Group will investigate taking forwards an ECAF/ SRDP application to fund part of this, and to co-ordinate the interpretation of the data collected.*

11.3 *Updated sheep information will be attained from group members for 2020 and 2025, in line with the data gathered on a five-year basis since 1995.*

Competence

Action Point

12.1 DMG members will seek to ensure that DMQ Level 1 and Trained Hunter status are delivered as the now accepted industry standard within the area, and encouragement will be given to professional stalkers to achieve DMQ level 2.

12.2 Training or support in higher level qualifications will be encouraged where that is appropriate.

Training

Action Points

13.1 Promote and facilitate the uptake of appropriate deer management qualifications..

13.2 Be aware of the ongoing development of Best Practice Guidance and any new techniques or standards that arise from that.

13.3 Review training needs on an annual basis.

Venison Marketing

Action Points

14.1 The DMG will work with ADMG to promote uptake of SQWV within the area, and seek to understand more carefully why uptake here is so poor.

14.2 In the medium term, beyond the settling in period for this Plan, the DMG will explore options to market venison from the area in a more collaborative manner.

Communications

Action Point

15.1 Implement the communications strategy as agreed, and ensure a mechanism is in place for dealing with business and issues between meetings.

PUBLIC INTEREST OUTCOMES

Develop Mechanisms to manage deer

Action Points

PIA 1.1 Publish and endorse the new South Perthshire Deer Management Plan in spring 2016.

PIA 1.2 Re-assess the Group against both the Benchmark and the Public Interest criteria once DMP has been endorsed, and then annually thereafter.

PIA 1.3 Review the Working Plan on an annual basis and minute progress and changes.

Delivering Designated Features in to Favourable condition

Action

PIA 2.1 Endorse PKC as a member of SPDMG, and invite Bolfracks Estate to join. PKC to focus roe deer culling effort in and around the SSSI area, and the fence at Bolfracks to be made secure.

PIA 2.2 Kinnaird Estate will be invited to join the Group, and to focus deer culling activities in and around Balnaguard Glen SSSI. The site is already in Favourable condition, but it is understood that wider regeneration of native species is not taking place.

PIA 2.3 Enclosures have been created and planted within the Monzie Woods SSSI in order to diversify species and age structure within the area. Browsing impacts in the wider area are attributed to roe deer and rabbits/voles, and bracken is preventing regeneration from developing over much of the site. Roe deer control will be targeted around the SSSI site to try and reduce the impacts from deer.

PIA 2.4 Dunira to take forward an SRDP scheme to fence deer out of the Comrie Woods SSSI, in addition to the efforts that have recently been undertaken to exclude sheep from the area. However, the dense canopy of the oakwood will make regeneration unlikely unless some felling coupes are contemplated within the area.

PIA 2.5 Active deer management requires to be implemented in and around the Cambusurich Wood SSSI. Owner to be invited to join SPDMG so that options for taking forward such activity can be assessed and implemented.

Manage Deer to retain existing Native Woodland cover and improve woodland condition in the medium to long term.

Actions

PIA 3.1 Work with Murthly & Strathbraan Estates to target fallow deer on their property and increase the amount of native woodland at low or medium impact levels.

Demonstrate DMG contribution to woodland expansion target

Actions

PIA 4.1 Private owners In South Perthshire to take forwards applications for approx 1485 ha of new planting.

PIA 4.4 All to ensure that recently planted woodland areas become properly established.

Monitor and manage deer impacts in the wider countryside

Action Point

PIA 5.1 An agreed monitoring programme for these habitats will be devised during the early part of 2016, to be endorsed and included in the Working Plan by April 2016.

Improve Scotland's ability to store carbon

Actions

PIA 6.1 Put in place a habitat monitoring scheme to determine the current status of blanket bogs within the area, and take action necessary to lower impacts on these should that be required.

PIA 6.2 Implement the woodland creation and native woodland restoration schemes mentioned previously

PIA 6.3 Discourage any burning that might impact on peatland sites.

PIA 6.4 Contribute to River Basin Management Planning as appropriate when requests to do so are forthcoming.

PIA 6.5 Consider taking any priority peatland sites forwards under the Peatlands Action programme, if applicable.

Reduce or mitigate the risk of invasive, non- native species

Action

PIA 7.1 Cull spreading sika deer throughout the Group area, especially in the woodland areas in the east of the DMG, and any suspected hybrids in the north of the Group.

PIA 7.2 Reduce fallow deer populations towards the east of the Group area, and try to keep this species within its current boundaries.

Protection of Historic and Cultural Features

Actions

PIA 8.1 The DMG will maintain communication with the local community and look to address any issues that are identified with regards to sites of cultural interest and herbivore grazing.

PIA 8.2 As required by Forestry Commission, all potential woodland creation projects, including natural regeneration schemes, will be assessed by the applicants for any negative impacts on cultural or archaeological sites.

Delivering higher standards of competence in deer management

Action Point

PIA 9.1 Continue to monitor qualifications held by estate staff, and promote a culture of continued professional training more widely.

Contribute to Public Health and wellbeingAction Points

PIA 10.1 Maintain communication with local Community Councils re: DVCs and look to implement any mitigation which may be deemed helpful in reducing local risk, particularly around Dunkeld and on the A85, although these two areas are currently outwith the DMG boundary. . Information on accidents should be sent to www.deercollisions.co.uk

PIA 10.2 Remind DMG members on an annual basis about the dangers of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and individual members to ensure safety precautions are taken by anyone who has had recent contact with deer or habitats in North America.

PIA 10.3 DMG to highlight the risks of ticks and Lyme's Disease to their guests and the public more generally through all appropriate channels.

PIA10.4 Group members and DMG to all promote a positive and welcoming message to all those visiting the area throughout the year.

PIA 10.5 SP DMG to continue with initiative to provide material to all accommodation providers in the area.

Maximize Economic benefits associated with deerAction Points

PIA 11.1 Investigate the possibility for a local means of advertising sporting opportunities within the area, during the first 2-3 years of this plan, initially through the new dedicated website for South Perthshire DMG.

PIA 11.2 Maintain larder standards across the 2 X DMG area, and work with ADMG, SQWV and others to have more larders accredited within the area.

Minimize the economic costs of deer managementAction Points

PIA 12.1 DMG to assess the current PACEC survey in to the value/ costs of deer management and extract information from SPDMDG in order to inform more fully the above narrative. Complete and adapt if necessary by spring 2017.

Ensure effective communication in deer management issuesAction Point

PIA 13.1 Take forwards those actions outlined in the Communications Policy/ Working Plan by spring 2016

Ensure Deer welfare at individual and population levelAction Points

PIA 14.1 Focus on bringing natural habitats in to favourable condition status, as measured by targets agreed with SNH, and maintain the minimum deer densities required to meet owner's objectives.

PIA 14.2 Liaise locally on significant woodland management operations where these affect shelter for deer.

PIA 14.3 Collect deer information within the Group as per agreed recommendations. This will provide animal- specific data which can be monitored and compared to identify potential welfare issues within the area.

Population Modelling/ Five Year Cull Plan

The following model is the agreed deer management model to be followed by the group during the period of this plan. The main objective of this management regime is to *actively maintain the habitats, forage and shelter required to sustain a healthy, resilient and productive deer herd*, capable of supporting a sporting stag cull of XXX animals, and also be in keeping with the main natural heritage and woodland & crop protection objectives within the area. An agreed apportionment by Deer Management Unit of the cull for 2016-17 is also provided for each of the three sub-groups within SPDMDG.

An Excel spreadsheet version of these models is provided as [Appendix 7, SPDMDG Five Year Population model](#).

Background

The information available for population modelling is a good helicopter count in December 2010, good but partial count data twice a year since then, and good cull data by all Group members. In practice, it is only meaningful to carry out population modelling for the Western sub- area, with the reasons for this being given below.

Eastern Group

The majority of red deer in the eastern group appear to be hidden within wooded areas, with a relatively small number on the open hill. The ongoing culls can not be sustained by the counted population, and population modelling would be meaningless within this area.

It is suggested that within the eastern group, that properties maintain their current culls for the period of this plan. There is a suggestion that numbers in woodland are rising. The situation needs to be monitored. The SSE open area around the Griffin Windfarm is strategically well placed to give indications on this, and dung counts are periodically undertaken within the Forest Enterprise property at Craigvinean. Culls will increase within the eastern area should this monitoring show that reductions are necessary. Open ground habitat monitoring may also give some indication, although sheep densities within the area are also high.

A fallow deer population model will be developed as interest in this species increases across the A9.

South Central Group

This area is becoming progressively fenced off from the rest of the Group, with the only remaining open area being to the west through Glenturrett Estate. In practice, the internal deer population here is now expected to fall to very low levels, with only a very minimal stag cull required by 2 X properties, and most culled deer probably being marauders from the west. A population model is therefore not applicable to this area, although recorded culls will be used to help inform the Western Group population model.

Western Group

The population model presented here below reflects the 2010 helicopter counts and all the culls taken since then. The model suggests that current culls are not sustainable, and that they are driving the population down. However, the consensus among the Steering Group is

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that this is not the case, and that the current population is a lot more stable than this, with high populations still in some key areas. It has been agreed that the Western Group will continue with the current cull of both stags and hinds until more complete count data becomes available again. Part of the issue is that with all the woodland around the periphery of the group, that many deer can go uncaptured. There is also a suggestion that the recruitment count for South Perthshire is being under-estimated. *The property-specific culls are outlined in [Appendix 5, SPDMG Target Culls 2016- 17](#). These are confidential to Group members and to SNH.*

Western Sub Group

| | Stags | Hinds | Calves | Density |
|--|--------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| 2010 spring population | <i>n/a</i> | <i>n/a</i> | <i>n/a</i> | n/a |
| December 2010 Count | 953 | 2514 | 784 | 9.4 |
| 2010/11 actual Cull after count | 0 | 141 | 49 | |
| 2011 Mortality | 19 | 50 | 47 | |
| 2011 Spring Population | 934 | 2323 | 688 | 8.8 |
| 2011 Summer Population | 1278 | 2667 | 613 | 10.1 |
| 2011/12 actual Cull | 396 | 434 | 189 | |
| 2012 Mortality | 26 | 53 | 37 | |
| 2012 Spring Population | 856 | 2179 | 388 | 7.6 |
| 2012 Summer Population | 1050 | 2373 | 498 | 8.7 |
| 2012/13 actual Cull | 361 | 387 | 148 | |
| 2013 Mortality | 21 | 47 | 30 | |
| 2013 Spring Population | 668 | 1939 | 320 | 6.5 |
| 2013 Summer Population | 828 | 2099 | 945 | 8.6 |
| 2013/14 actual Cull | 274 | 283 | 142 | |
| 2014 Mortality | 17 | 42 | 57 | |
| 2014 Spring Population | 538 | 1774 | 746 | 6.8 |
| 2014 Summer Population | 911 | 2147 | 730 | 8.4 |
| 2014/15 actual Cull | 348 | 375 | 135 | |
| 2015 Mortality | 18 | 43 | 44 | |
| 2015 Spring Population | 544 | 1729 | 551 | 6.3 |
| 2015 Summer Population | 820 | 2004 | 601 | 7.6 |

Habitat Monitoring

A key part of this plan will be to agree, fund and implement a comprehensive programme of habitat monitoring across the DMG, both on designated sites and in the wider countryside.

Such a programme will consist of a combination of statutory Site Condition Monitoring (SCM) by SNH, and private habitat impact assessments (HIA), a proportion of which may be carried out by contractor, or where training may be required to bring estate staff up to the necessary level of ability to do this themselves. A key part of any programme will be agency support in identifying sample plots, and storage and upkeep of information.

It is suggested that such a programme of monitoring is established by the Group in conjunction with SNH by May 2016, with sufficient information being available to allow an SRDP application to be submitted on behalf of the Group. It is suggested that between the Collaboration Fund, the Agro Environment Scheme, individual estate input and support from SNH, that it will be possible to cover the cost of development of such a habitat monitoring programme, which is expected to include provision for training as well as the potential use of contractors.

Recommended Habitat Monitoring programme

It is suggested that, in addition to the monitoring work on designated sites, that the Group monitor two habitats, blanket bog and dwarf shrub heath, to give an indication of impacts in the wider countryside.

SNH have recommended that for each habitat type, 30 sample points be developed within each property, with the same plots being monitored on an annual basis. Within the Group, there are a large number of relatively small properties, and some others who have never participated in the Group in the past. It is important not to over-burden these properties at the outset. It is suggested therefore that 30 plots per habitat will be monitored for the bigger properties within the Group, including the grouse moors, with ten of these being monitored each year on a rolling basis. The smaller participating members will monitor 15 plots per property per habitat, with one third of these in any one year. The properties which are being newly recruited will not be monitored in the first five years of this plan, but this situation will then be reviewed in 2021, with all active members being included at that point. These plots have been marked on the map **16. SPDMG Habitat Monitoring Map**.

The above suggested schedule gives 498 blanket bog points and 654 dwarf shrub heath points. On a 3 year rolling programme, this would require 384 plots to be monitored annually across the DMG. This is a very considerable level of coverage, but it is appropriate given the relatively poor information currently available, the extent of blanket bog within the Group, and the changing pattern of land use back to grouse and sheep, and which requires a careful balance between grazing and heather growth.

It is suggested that 2 X people could measure 12 X plots in a day, with perhaps 5 days required to plan for and collate information across the Group when complete.

It is recommended that the Group take on an external contractor to lead on and co-ordinate

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the work in the first year, tutoring group members to do the work in subsequent years, but with a reduced co-ordination input required. The Group could then apply to SRDP to cover the external costs, allowing that this would be 50% of the total.

The external cost of doing this is likely to be £8-10000 in the first year, perhaps reducing to half this in a subsequent year, to maybe £2000 a year once group members are proficient in carrying out their own monitoring, only then requiring some limited external co-ordination and data collation and interpretation.