West Sutherland Deer Management Group North Sub Group Deer Management Working Plan



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1. Introduction

Deer are regarded as a natural resource and as such all those who manage them have a 'responsibility' as set out in the <u>Code of Practice on Deer Management</u>. In most circumstances this responsibility is not a legal obligation but is a moral and social one. The concept of responsible deer management focuses on:

- managing deer as a resource sustainably;
- minimising negative deer impacts on public interest;
- safeguarding deer welfare;
- working cooperatively over deer management.

Located in the North-West of Scotland, the West Sutherland North Sub-Group (NSG) is one of four sub-groups that make up West Sutherland Deer Management Group (WSDMG). The Sub-Group covers an area of approximately **29,458** ha and has three main members: **Merkland, Reay Forest & Kylestrome and Scourie.**

The overall purpose of this Plan is to provide:

- An agreed statement of the shared views of the Members of the Group about the management of wild deer in the area covered by the Group;
- An agreed set of actions to try and ensure that deer management in the area is in line with those shared views;
- An agreed pattern of arrangements to try and ensure that the actions are implemented and their effectiveness monitored.

This Deer Management Plan has been formally adopted by all the Members of the Group and will run from 2016 to 2021. It builds on the information gathered in **previous plans for Reay Forest** which ran from 2007. It has been through a consultation process and a copy of the current DMP has been given to the local Community Councils. The Deer Management Plan consists of three parts:

- **The Working Plan:** Provides a summary of Sub-Group proposed actions. The Working Plan has been designed to be updated as needs arise and will be reviewed on a six-monthly basis or as required, with a review of the whole plan taking place at the end of the five year period. .
- Appendix 1: Deer Management Plan Background Information: This section contains background
 information about the Sub-Group and its members and sets out the Public Interest relating to Deer
 Management in the local area and the actions required by the sub-group to deliver it.
- Appendix 2: Group Operation: Contains information relating to the Operation and Functioning of WSDMG.

The Sub Group are committed to working collaboratively to deliver the objectives of the plan and will meet regularly to discuss deer management and issues that arise in the local and wider West Sutherland area. This Plan will therefore take account all sporting, agricultural and forestry interests as well as those of other Statutory Organisations and the wider public interest.

2. Group Objectives

The purpose of the West Sutherland North Sub Group is to manage deer on a cooperative basis, in accordance with Scottish Government strategy (Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach, 2015), the <u>Code of Practice on Deer Management</u> (2012), and in a manner that integrates different land-use objectives, recognising that compromises over objectives may be required where conflict occurs.

The collective objectives of the Sub Group are to:

- Manage deer as a sustainable resource.
- Minimising negative deer impacts on special sites and wider conservation interests.
- Safeguarding welfare.
- Working cooperatively over deer management.

Specifically the Working Plan will seek to:

- Identify DMP targets and actions related to the Public Interest as set out in Appendix 1
- Set cull targets based on deer census information and population models
- Set out a monitoring and Review Schedule

3. Counts

The last full helicopter count of the Sub Group was conducted in 2016. Deer density on Scourie is lower than that on Reay and Merkland because of the fence.

Table 1: Deer Count Information

	Property	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Total	Density (Deer per Km2)
	Reay & Kylestrome	716	961	393	2070	11.65
	Merkland	133	263	108	504	11.49
2006	Total (Reay & Kylestrome and Merkland)	849	1224	501	2574	11.62
	Scourie	5	4	1	10	0.13
	Scourie (Glebe)	4	0	0	4	2.78
2008	Reay & Kylestrome	702	1089	477	2268	16.67
2010	Reay & Kylestrome	533	759	225	1517	8.54
2012	Reay & Kylestrome	612	926	287	1825	10.26
2014	Reay & Kylestrome	586	951	410	1947	10.94
	Reay & Kylestrome	704	1076	347	2163	12.15
	Merkland	169	229	74	472	10.76
2016	Total (Reay & Kylestrome and Merkland)	873	1305	421	2635	11.89
	Scourie	20	30	10	60	0.77

4. Historic Culls

Collectively, between Merkland and Reay Forest Estate the 5 Year average cull for both properties has been 117 stags but both properties would like to sustainably harvest 120. In order to achieve this, a minimum population of approximately 900 stags and 900 hinds is required (an overall density of approximately 9.3 deer per km2). Scourie will want to cull deer where damage is caused on crofts and in woodlands.

Table 3: Sub Group Culls

		Sub-g	group			Merk	dand			Re	ay			Sco	urie		Merkla	and and	Reay	
Year	S	Н	С	T	S	Н	С	T	S	Н	C	T	S	Н	C	Т	S	Н	С	T
2005-2006	129	136	29	294	35	0	0	35	94	136	29	259	0	0	0	0	129	136	29	294
2006-2007	107	147	67	321	37	55	16	108	70	92	51	213	0	0	0	0	107	147	67	321
2007-2008	135	195	110	440	35	55	20	110	89	140	83	312	11	0	7	18	124	195	103	422
2008-2009	143	272	129	544	28	53	30	111	111	219	99	429	4	0	0	4	139	272	129	540
2009-2010	133	272	127	532	30	49	15	94	94	218	112	424	9	5	0	14	124	267	127	518
2010-2011	127	142	54	323	26	42	19	87	95	93	35	223	6	7	9	13	121	135	54	310
2011-2012	116	110	37	263	30	48	14	92	81	62	23	166	5	0	0	5	111	110	37	258
2012-2013	112	133	50	295	30	52	18	100	77	75	32	184	5	6	0	11	107	127	50	284
2013-2014	129	150	57	336	28	48	13	89	95	93	44	232	6	9	0	15	123	141	57	321
2014-2015	142	223	118	483	33	49	16	98	100	169	102	371	9	5	0	14	133	218	118	469

5. Population Targets

To achieve the overall objectives for the Sub Group, a minimum combined target population of 900 stags and 900 hinds is currently required between Reay & Kylestrome and Merkland.

Reay Forest have 4 management "beats" and have the following Spring Population target populations for 2020 on each.

Table 4: Reay Forest Beat Population Targets

Reay Forest Beat	Population Figures 2016				Target Population Figures 2020				
	Stags Hinds Ca		Calves	Total	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Total	
Glencoul	121	196	66	383	125	187	50	362	
Glendhu	63	315	95	473	82	261	74	417	
Kylestrome	360	359	113	832	321	285	85	691	
Stack	160	206	73	439	168	183	47	398	
Total	704	1076	347	2127	696	916	256	1868	

Table 5: Target Populations on Individual Estates

		Stags	Hinds	Calves	Total	Density
Actual Population 2016	Merkland and Reay	873	1305	421	2635	11.9
2020 Spring Target Populations	Reay Target	696	916	256	1868	10.5
2020 Spring Target Populations	Merkland Target	?	229	74	472	10.8
2020 Spring Target Populations	Merkland and Reay Combined Target	900	1145	330	2340	10.6
2020 Spring Target Populations	Scourie Target	20	30	10	60	0.8

Table 6: Population Model for Reay Forest and Merkland

		Stags	Hinds	Calves	Density
2016	Spring Actual Population	873	1305	421	11.7
	Summer Population	1084	1516	485	13.9
	Cull	137	240	114	
	Mortality	22	30	29	
2017	Spring Population	925	1245	342	11.3
	Summer Population	1096	1416	453	13.4
	Cull	137	240	114	
	Mortality	22	28	27	
2018	Spring Population	937	1148	312	10.8
	Summer Population	1093	1304	417	12.7
	Cull	125	140	83	
	Mortality	22	26	25	
2019	Spring Population	946	1138	309	10.8
	Summer Population	1101	1292	414	12.7
	Proposed Cull	110	140	59	
	Mortality	22	26	25	
2020	Spring Population	969	1126	330	10.9
	Summer Population	1134	1291	413	12.8
	Cull	110	120	50	
	Mortality	23	26	25	
2021	Spring Population	1001	1146	338	11.2

7. Cull Targets 2016 -2017

	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Total
Reay - Kylestrome	40	70	35	145
Reay - Glencoul	20	30	15	65
Reay - Glendhu	30	55	30	115
Reay -Stack	17	35	18	70
Merkland	30	50	16	96
	137	240	114	491

8. Group Operation Actions

Actions to develop mechanisms to manage deer	When	Who	How?
8.1 Repeat DMG Assessment.	By Spring 2016 and ongoing	NSG Chair	Use baseline DMG Assessment carried out in 2014.
8.2 Final Plan as agreed by the Sub-Group and Minutes of Meetings will be made publically available and published on WSDMG Website.	By Spring 2016 and ongoing	NSG Chair	WSDMG Website.
8.3 Working plan will be reviewed and updated annually by the Group. Management actions will be adjusted and agreed accordingly. An annual report will be produced.	Annually	NSG Members	Provision of data from Sub Group members in advance of and during Bi-annual meetings. Sub Group will update Working Plan and produce an Annual Report to be published on the DMG Website.
8.4 Culls will be delivered and reported on to Sub Group and WSDMG. Cull targets will be set and agreed where appropriate based on information relating to habitat condition, population census, deer welfare and any other relevant information (i.e. where deer are impacting negatively on the Public Interest).	Annually	NSG Members	Population models where appropriate will be updated annually and cull targets set, agreed and delivered according.
8.5 The helicopter count conducted in 2016 will be repeated in Year 5 or as may be agreed.	Spring 2021	NSG Chair & NSG Members	Sub Group will ensure adequate resources in place for repeat helicopter count in 2021 and liaise with neighbouring Sub Groups to coordinate count at the same time if possible. Deer managers will conduct sample counts of hinds: calves in early April where appropriate.
8.6 Recruitment counts will be conducted annually where appropriate.	Ideally first two weeks in April but by May.	NSG Members	Stalkers will undertake sample counts of groups of deer recording stags, hinds and previous year's calves.
8.7 Sub Group will encourage engagement with local Community Councils.	Ongoing	NSG Chair	Meeting dates and Agendas will be publically available on WSDMG website and circulated to community councils in advance.
8.8 Sub Group will contribute to a review of deer movements within WSDMG and make adjustments to DMG Sub Group boundaries if required	Autumn 2016 & 2021	NSG Members	Deer Count data from 2016 and 2021 will be reviewed by WSDMG and boundaries of Sub-Groups reviewed and amended if necessary.

8.9 Group will consider making an Environmental Co-operation Action Fund application to assist in the delivery of the DMP and to 50% fund a repeat helicopter count.	September 2016	NSG Chair	ECAF application opportunities for 2016/17 are still to be clarified by the Scottish Government.
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9. Designated Sites Actions

Actions for the delivery of designated features into Favourable Condition	When?	Who?	How?
9.1 Loch a'Mhuilinn SSSI and NNR - current action underway to maintain Favourable Condition status of the SSSI.	By Autumn 2016 and On- going	Scourie Estate	In recent years the roe deer cull has been inadequate. The estate wishes to address this issue. Scourie will continue to work with SNH and plan to improve roe deer control.
9.2 Loch Glencoul SSSI - current action underway which will move site into 'Unfavourable Recovering due to Management' condition	By 2017	Reay Forest	Reay Forest to work with SNH to erect a deer fenced exclosure around the section of the SSSI that falls on the Estate. Fencing works to be implemented in 2017.
9.3 Stack Woods SSSI. Existing successful regeneration to be monitored now that fences have been opened up and 'Unfavourable Recovering' status to be maintained.	Ongoing	Reay Forest	Reay Forest to continue to monitor woodland condition and implement management actions if required.
9.4 In areas where Designated Sites are believed to be under threat, to foster cooperation between neighbouring estates to manage deer numbers and densities as appropriate.	Ongoing	NSG Members	Deer managers will communicate on an on-going basis with regards to deer movements and identify opportunities for collaborative management.

10. Woodland Actions

Actions to manage deer to retain existing native woodland cover and improve woodland condition	When?	Who?	How?
10.1 SNH to provide information on native woodland from Chris Ferrera Surveys (1995).	By Autumn 2016	SNH	Relevant Chris Fererra Reports to be made available to the Group.
10.2 For properties with SRDP Natural Regeneration Schemes in place, provide evidence of woodland condition in the form of an appropriate survey report if available.	Year 3	NSG Members	Woodland Survey reports.
10.3 To consider the use of ECAF bid to undertake a review of native woodland condition in the Group area, consolidating existing survey reports and implementing woodland herbivore impacts assessment monitoring protocols where required. See monitoring Schedule in Working Plan.	Year 3	NSG Members & Consultant if required.	Subject to successful ECAF bid, delivery of DMG Native Woodland Review Report and recommended actions.
10.4 To implement management to reduce negative impacts including use of Forestry Grant Schemes where practical and appropriate.	By 2021	NSG Members	Monitoring results used to inform management actions. Entry into Forestry Grant Schemes where applicable.
Actions to demonstrate DMG contribution to the Scottish Government woodland expansion target of 25% woodland cover.	When?	Who?	How?
10.5 To inform the Sub Group about any future woodland proposals and incorporate in the DMP - taking account of potential implications for deer management.	Ongoing	NSG Members	Members will circulate/present proposals to DMG for discussion.
10.6 NSG to consider the use of ECAF bid to carry out a strategic review of potential opportunities for new woodland schemes using the Scottish Government's Forestry Strategy. Review will consider need from a DMG perspective ie shelter provision for deer population at landscape scale.	Year 2	NSG Members & Consultant if required	Subject to ECAF bid, delivery of DMG Woodland Expansion Report and recommended actions. This is to depend on the objectives of Estates and available resources.

11 Wider Habitat Actions

Actions to monitor and manage deer impacts in the wider countryside	When?	Who?	How?
11.1 SNH to provide information on wider habitats from Chris Ferrera Surveys (1995).	By Autumn 2016	SNH	Relevant Chris Fererra Reports to be made available to the Sub Group.
11.2 Using revised BPG Guidance undergo training, set up plots and carry out a baseline habitat impact assessment (HIA) of the current grazing and trampling impacts on blanket bog & dwarf shrub heath. Include provision of assistance within ECAF bid.	May & June 2017	Reay Forest, Merkland & Consultant if required	Subject to ECAF bid consultant, will work with individual Sub Group members to set up random plots and to provide assistance with data analysis and the production of a report.
11.3 Members with existing habitat monitoring encouraged to share results with Sub Group where appropriate.	Ongoing	Reay Forest & Merkland	Members will circulate monitoring results to Sub Group.
11.4 Summary of initial assessment results reported to Sub Group. Targets and management actions agreed.	Autumn 2017	Reay Forest & Merkland	Sub Group will agree management decisions based on Habitat Baseline Report.
11.5 Repeat HIA and management actions agreed.	May & June 2020	Reay Forest, Merkland & Consultant if required.	Members will collect repeat monitoring data. Consultant (if required) to provide assistance with data analysis and the production of a report. Members will use report to inform management.
Actions to improve Scotland's ability to store carbon by maintaining or improving ecosystem health.	When?	Who?	How?
11.6 Using revised BPG Guidance set up plots and carry out a baseline habitat impact assessment (HIA) of the current grazing and trampling impacts on blanket bog and native woodland.	As per monitoring schedule in the Working plan	Reay Forest & Merkland	As per Actions 14 -24. Members to provide existing survey reports or conduct baseline monitoring and reports.
11.7 Potential areas for Peatland Restoration identified and options for Peatland restoration or management through the Peatland Action Fund promoted to Sub Group Members	Autumn 2017	NSG Members & NSG Chair	Members to use Blanket Bog monitoring results (where available) as well as assistance from SNH to identify opportunities for Peatland Restoration. Uptake will depend on Estate Objectives.

11.8 Contribute to River Basin Management Planning as appropriate particularly with regards to riparian woodland development.	By end of 2016 and ongoing	NSG Members	DMG will consult with West Sutherland Fisheries Trust and East Sutherland Fisheries Trust.
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12 Invasive Species Actions

Actions to reduce or mitigate the risk of establishment of invasive non-native species	When?	Who?	How?
12.1 Muntjac Deer managed as per the Non-native Species Policy (Group Operation Document - Appendix 2).	Ongoing	NSG Members	Possible threats of introduction or establishment of Muntjac Deer are managed (See Appendix 2, 1.12.5)
12.2 Sika Deer managed to prevent their establishment within the DMG area and managed as per the Non-Native Species Policy (Group Operation Document - Appendix 2).	Ongoing	NSG Members	Members will report sightings to DMG and will shoot Sika on sight (within current legal restrictions).
12.3 Feral goat and feral pig management policy to be agreed.	By end 2016	DMG Members	Group will use meeting in Autumn to agree a policy for the management of Feral Goats and Feral Pigs should they ever become established.

13 Historical and Cultural Features Actions

Actions to protect designated historic and cultural features from being damaged by deer e.g. by trampling.	When?	Who?	How?
13.1 Identify and report any features within the Sub Group area that may be impacted on by deer and report them to the Sub Group as appropriate.	By end of 2016	NSG Members	DMG members to report at Autumn DMG meeting on features identified.

14 Competence and Training Actions

Actions to contribute to delivering higher standards of competence in deer management.	When?	Who?	How?
14.1 DMG will adopt the training policy statement (Group Operation Document - Appendix 2).	Spring 2016	NSG Members	Adopted as part of DMP.
14.2 Ascertain training levels among DMG Members and report on progress on an annual basis.	By Autumn 2016 & Annually	NSG Chair and Members	All NSG members asked to provide an initial summary of staff qualifications to NSG Chair. Verbal report and update at Spring meetings.
14.3 As required, develop and implement a training programme to assist in the provision of training for DMG Members who lack the necessary qualification or for individuals who wish to enhance their skills.	Annually	NSG Chair & WSDMG Secretary	Annual training programme to be agreed at Spring meeting. WSDMG Secretary to organise courses/events. Opportunities to be explored with Coigach Assynt Living Landscapes project.

15 Health and Wellbeing Actions

Actions to Identify and promote opportunities contributing to public health and wellbeing.	When?	Who?	How?
15.1 Provide existing published information/publications on access, CWD and health information about tick awareness to visitors/clients.	By end of 2016 and ongoing	NSG Chair & NSG Members	Chair to circulate leaflets at Spring/Autumn meetings for members to distribute. Information made available on DMG website.
15.2 Raise awareness of threats relating to Chronic Wasting Disease and sign up to CWD Biosecurity Policy (Group Operation Document - Appendix 2).	By end of 2016 and ongoing	NSG Members	Members to raise awareness of CWD with Clients and Visitors from USA and Canada.
15.3 Investigate opportunities for awareness raising/educational events for the local community.	Ongoing	NSG Members	Members to discuss opportunities at Spring meeting. Possible opportunities with Coigach Assynt Living Landscapes project to be explored. Open events to be advertised on DMG website.
15.4 Provide opportunities for any concerns from the local community to be addressed.	Ongoing	NSG Chair	Meeting dates and Agendas will be publically available on DMG website and circulated to community councils in advance. Chair contact details will be available on website.

16 Economic Actions

Actions to maximise economic benefits associated with deer	When?	Who?	How?
16.1 Investigate opportunities for membership of SQWV Quality Assurance Scheme.	By 2021	NSG Members	On-going discussion at DMG meetings.
16.2 Investigate opportunities for more effective collection of carcasses and possible collaborative pricing of venison/game dealer prices on behalf of the DMG.	Annually	NSG Chair & NSG Members	Discussion at Spring meeting. Chair to negotiate on DMG behalf.
16.3 Investigate opportunities for larder-sharing and local marketing of venison.	By Autumn 2016.	NSG Chair & NSG Members	Discussion at meetings.
16.4 DMG Members to investigate opportunities for collaboration in order to maximise the resource value of let stalking across the group. Opportunities to collectively market stalking also explored.	Ongoing	NSG Members	Individual members to undertake.
16.5 NSG Members to continue to monitor sustainable harvest of sporting stags.	Ongoing	NSG Chair & NSG Members	Population model used to monitor sustainable harvest of stags. Deer movement meetings following deer count used to monitor stags movements across Sub-Groups.
Actions to minimise the economic costs of deer, and ensure deer management is cost-effective	When?	Who?	How?
16.6 Ensure local crofting/ forestry interests are consulted on DMP and invited to/represented at DMG meetings.	Spring 2016	NSG Chairman	DMG Chair will correspond with relevant parties.

16.7 Set up monitoring and reporting of DVCs through website, DMG meetings and local Police contact.	Spring 2016 and ongoing	NSG Members	Members record and report DVCs to main WSDMG meetings. Reay Forest and Merkland to record all culling locations using a Grid Reference to illustrate culling effort near the road. Members of the public asked to report DVCs to DMG Secretary on website.
16.8 Implement actions to mitigate against DVC hotspots including localised deer management, use of signage, fencing etc.	Ongoing	NSG Members	Where hot-spots occur, DMG to discuss appropriate actions at meetings.
16.9 Report on out of season and night shooting authorisations.	Annually	NSG Members	Members to inform NSG Chair in advance of intention to apply for authorisations. Members to report numbers of deer culled under authorisation at meetings.

17 Communications Actions

Actions to ensure effective communication on deer management issues	When?	Who?	How?
17.1 Identify stakeholders and consult on all Sub-Group draft plans.	Spring 2016	NSG Chair	Draft DMPs made available on public website. Relevant stakeholders identified and invited to consult.
17.2 Final Plan and Minutes of Meetings will published on DMG Website.	Spring 2016	NSG Chair & WSDMG Secretary	DMG Website.
17.3 DMG Constitution and ADMG Principles of Collaboration adopted (Group Operation Document - Appendix 2).	Spring 2016	NSG Members	Adopted as part of DMP.
17.4 Agree and adopt a Communications Policy (Group Operation Document - Appendix 2).	Spring 2016	NSG Members	Adopted as part of DMP.

18 Deer Welfare Actions

Actions to ensure deer welfare is taken fully into account at individual animal and population level	When?	Who?	How?
18.1 Agree and adopt welfare policy (Group Operation Document - Appendix 2).	Spring 2016	NSG Members	Implemented through every day Best Practice in deer management.
18.2 Provide information on welfare indicators annually. Baseline information established in year 1 of DMP and welfare indicators reported on annually. Any resulting management actions agreed and implemented by members.	Annually at Autumn Meeting	NSG Members	Deer managers to provide information on average larder weights and annual calf recruitment.
18.3 Any new fencing in Sub Group area will consider welfare implications in design and extent and the appropriate management undertaken. New fencing reported to DMG.	Ongoing	NSG Members	New fencing proposals will be consulted with NSG and reported to WSDMG.
18.4 Monitoring and reporting of significant levels of winter mortality.	Ongoing	NSG Members	Deer managers will provide information (figures & location) on winter mortality.

19. NSG Monitoring and Review Schedule

		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Actions	Who?	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
	NSG	Spring				Spring
Helicopter Deer Count	Members	Count				Count
	NSG	Spring &	Spring &	Spring &	Spring &	Spring
Recruitment Count	Members	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer
	Merkland &	Spring/				
Habitat Training	Reay Forest	Summer				
Habitat Monitoring	Merkland &					
Blanket Bog	Reay Forest		Summer			Summer
Habitat Monitoring	Merkland &					
Dwarf Shrub Heath	Reay Forest		Summer			Summer
Habitat Monitoring						
Native Woodland	NSG					
Review	Members			Summer		
Woodland Expansion	NSG					
Review	Members		Summer			
Review Habitat	NSG					
Results	Members	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
	NSG	Spring &				
Set & Agree Culls	Members	Autumn	Autumn	Autumn	Autumn	Autumn
Collate DMG				Review		Review
Information & Review		Bi-	Bi-	DMP-	Bi-	DMP-
Working Plan Actions	NSG Chair	annually	annually	Spring	annually	Spring
						Review
Produce Annual						DMP -
Report	NSG Chair	Spring	Spring	Spring	Spring	Spring