

East Ross Deer Group Management Plan 2023 -2028

The plan was produced for the East Ross Deer Management group by [Land Consultancy Services Ltd](#)

Introduction and executive summary

This deer management plan (DMP), is a continuation to this groups original DMP published in 2016 following the introduction of the DMG code of group benchmarking carried out by SNH, now Nature.scot. It has been produced for the East Ross Deer Management Group (ERDMG) by Land Consultancy Services Ltd (LCS) and is intended to take effect from the 1st of March 2023.

This plan is published with the objective of displaying the reasoning that underpins the management of wild deer, buy group members within the group area. It, in effect, incorporates the baseline for the groups collaborative activities, and objectives for the effective management of the wild deer herd of all species, across the geographical footprint of the DMG.

The plan will be subject to regular review to allow the DMG to react to the changing environment of deer management over the period of the plan. It will be updated to reflect changes within the DMG, the DMG members, the habitat within the DMG geographical area, and to reflect any statutory changes in legislation affecting the DMGs interests and activities, both in the management of the wild deer, and the habitat and environs on which they exist or otherwise, over the plan's lifespan through to Autumn 2028.

The group will employ a method of continuous review of their activities and actions in regard to the management of the wild deer, to ensure they, as a collective, adhere to industry codes of practice as they develop, along with working within the framework of deer related legislation as and when they evolve.

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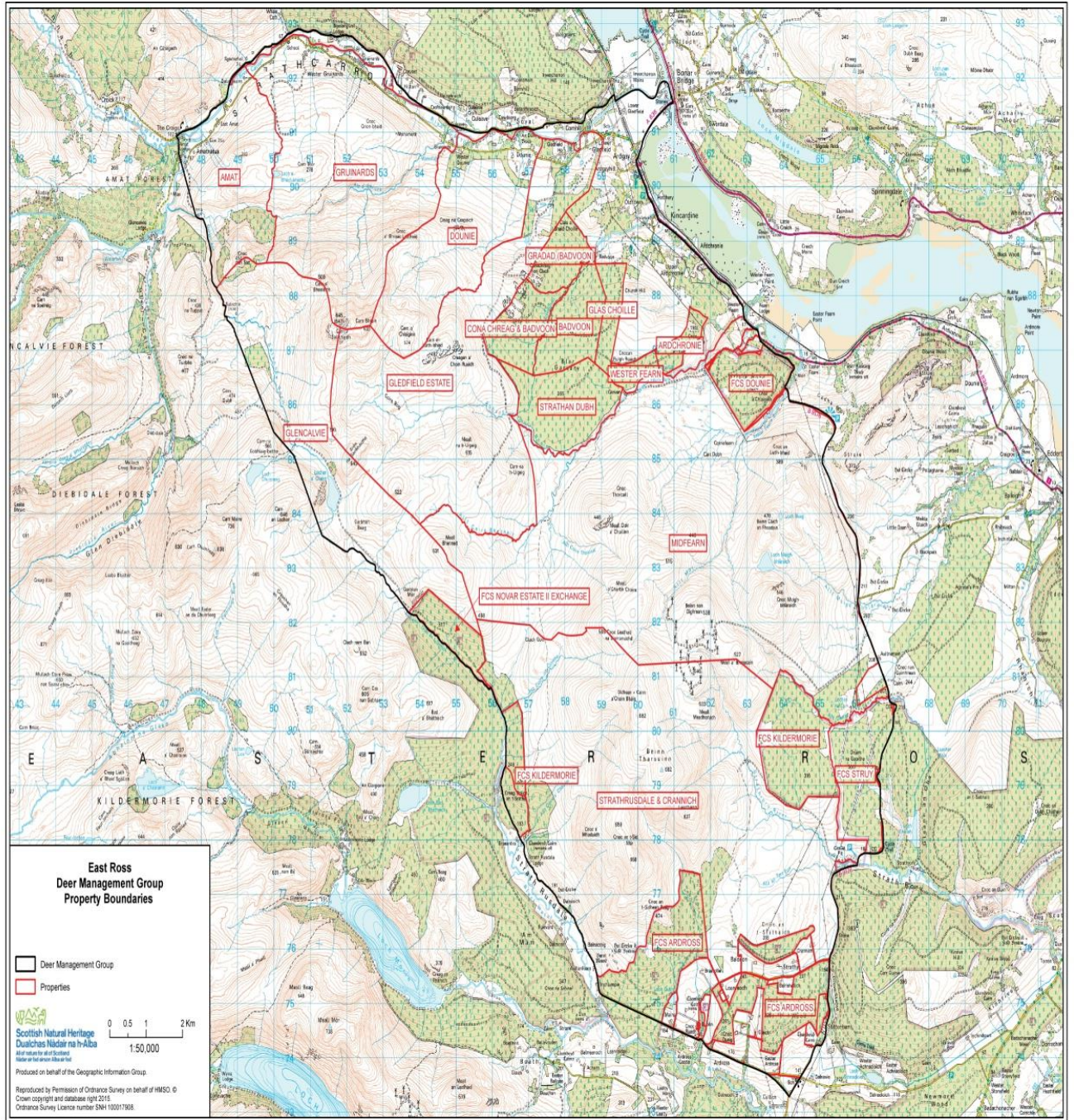
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East Ross Deer Management Group Area



Deer Management Plan Purpose

Wild Deer in Scotland have a unique place within the history & culture of our upland areas. Red deer are recognized Internationally as an iconic species and Nature.scot, the public body charged with the custodianship of the country's natural environment, have recognized its importance by historically including red deer within 5 of Scotland's most iconic wildlife creatures.

Wild deer and their habits are ever evolving, and the plan is designed to be a living document to assist with the management of the wild deer found within the Group boundaries and allow for changing conditions and circumstances over its lifespan which covers the period 2023-2028. The Plan will formally be reviewed by the group on a 6 monthly basis, and changes will be made wherever the need arises.

The geographic area covered by this Deer Management Plan extends to an area of approximately 20,000 hectares, which is made up of several land types and use, but is principally one of open heather moorland and blanket bog, with a number of woodland enclosures and some improved farmland to the South and North.

The nucleus of the group is currently formulated by 7 of the largest private land owners within the group area. The 7 members have been working in loose collaboration for more than 20 years, in regard to the management of the wild deer herd found within their range. It is hoped that this update to the groups original plan, will increase the interest in wild deer as a multi-faceted resource within the group area, including all areas where wild deer have impacts, and other landowners and users, may become engaged in deer issues and participate within the group.

The plan outlines the principle aims and activities of each of the group members such as agriculture, conservation, forestry, and energy production and how that will interlink with the management of the wild deer herd in a sustainable manner, and to the benefit of not only the individuals involved but also to the wider local community.

The principal species to be considered by this plan are Red Deer in the open hill range. However, the growing presence of both Sika and Roe can also be found within the group area, and the management of all 3 species has an important role to play, in the delivery of sustainable land management practices.

The use of statistical evidence collated by Nature.scot, such as annual population census data, culling information, natural deer recruitment, and mortality records for wild deer populations, along with a regular assessment of the habitat on which the deer reside, has become the primary tool for managing the resident deer population within upland Scotland, and forms the foundation of this management plan.

This management model enables natural changes in the demographic for a variety of reasons relating to natural occurrences, whilst remaining able to deliver the fundamental principles of natural capital values and management.

Whilst the group recognises the needs and benefits of an active and working, wild deer management plan, they are also acutely aware that the successful management of the wild deer found within the group area, does not come without financial investment by members. Principally this comes in the form of committed, motivated and highly skilled staff, who will ultimately adopt much of the responsibility for the practical delivery of the deer management plan.

It is therefore incumbent on the DMG that this is also achieved whilst adopting the industry Best Practice Guidance – Guidance which has been developed by SNH over a number of years, and is now adopted and recognized as the minimum benchmark for individuals actively operating in the management of wild deer within Scotland.

It is intended that this plan will provide the following:

- Provide a strategic overview of the management of wild deer within the group boundaries and provide an ongoing platform, for more detailed discussion and planning within the ERDMG on an annual basis, for the effective delivery of both the management of the wild deer herd, for the benefit of the members, the natural environment, and the wider public interest and safety.

- Ensure that there continues to be a collaborative, and sustainable approach, to the management of wild deer of all species, encountered within the group geographic boundaries.

- To ensure that full engagement and interaction takes place wherever necessary, between the DMG and communities, businesses, organisations and individuals who reside in and are active within the group geographical area.

- A set of renewed, realistic actions which enable delivery of the DMG objectives.

- A strategy that reflects the aspirations that group members hold in respect of the management of wild deer, within the wider natural environment and habitats of the DMG area.

- Assist in maintaining and strengthening the economic, social, and cultural benefits of wild deer to the local communities that interlink with the DMG.

- A working document that is available for inspection and comment by interested members of the wider public within the DMG area.

- Enables the DMG to enable delivery of the maximum level of public benefit from a member of what is now accepted as one of Scotland's top 5 wildlife creatures.

About the group

The Group Area

The East Ross Deer Management group encapsulates a land area of circa 20,000 hectares of mixed land types, with the dominant land types being heather moorland, commercial forestry blocks, parcels of farmland both for arable and stock farming use. In the Northern section of the group there are areas of the land which are under crofting tenure, including 3 areas of common grazing.

The deer group range is predominantly fenced on its boundaries with stock proof deer fencing, and in reality, there is little by the way of inward or outward migration within the wild deer herd. The Eastern boundary follows the B9176 Ardross to Ardgay road. This boundary, which extends for approximately 16 miles is formed by a deer fence for almost its entirety, with the remaining unfenced area being completed during the period of the previous Deer Management Plan.

Much of this fencing excludes the wild deer from free movement, into woodland under public and private ownership and also protects agricultural land to the south and north of the group.

The south of the group area is bounded by the settlement of Ardross (*Population 150*) which is 2 miles north of the town of Alness (*Population 5800*) on the edge of the industrialised Cromarty Firth. Ardross community has some agricultural activities and interests, and this area is where the arable farming activity, within the group boundaries takes place. The arable land is predominantly protected from the open deer range by deer fencing, some of which directly protects the farmland, and some which protects via the forestry blocks that bound the farmland.

The community has its own school and modern community centre which acts as the hub of the community activities. Ardross Community Council were consulted as part of the preparation of the deer management plan.

On the eastern fringe of the deer group is the community of Edderton (population 338), which is primarily a crofting and farming community. They are served by their own primary school with senior schooling provided in Tain (4 miles) to the east. The community has a buffer of open farm & moorland which places it out with the actual boundaries of the group (2 miles). Significantly, the physical impacts felt on communities within deer management group areas is mitigated, in this instance, as the modern boundary deer fence which is in place provides that there is little, if any physical impact felt by deer, which are managed under the auspices of this plan. Any deer population impacts on this community are minimal and arise from a local population of roe deer and small numbers of red deer which are hefted within the privately and public owned forestry blocks, to the north & south of the community.

On the North of the group area is the settlement area of Ardgay (Population 496) which is bounded by interests relating to crofting, farming & forestry. The river Carron a salmon fishing river of some reputation, flows directly into the Kyle of Sutherland to the North of the village.

The Kyle of Sutherland is the confluence linking the Dornoch firth with the significant salmon hosting rivers of central Sutherland. These comprise the Carron, Shin, Cassley and the upper and lower Oykel. These rivers have vast ecological, environmental and economic significance to the wider region. The River Oykel being designated as a Specially Protected Area (SPA).

The northern reaches of the group form part of the water catchment area for the river Carron. Given that some of the current group members have significant interests both ecologically, and economically, within this river system, the considerations of positive deer management as outlined throughout this plan, ensures that any potential threats to this ecosystem will be fully considered and reduced or removed.

Easter Ross Deer Management Group

Individual Group Members

Strathruisdale Estate

Interests	Hectares	% of Group Area
<u>Sheep Farming, Sporting Estate, Renewables & minerals</u>	<u>2710</u>	<u>14%</u>

The estate employs four people part time, two of whom hold DMQ level1 & 2 (Fit and Comp register & Trained Hunter Status), along with First Aid, Manual Handling, Deer Prep and Larder work and ATV certification.

Crannich Estate

Interests	Hectares	% of Group Area
<u>Sheep Farming, Sporting Estate, Renewables & minerals</u>	<u>1648</u>	<u>9%</u>

The estate employs two people part time, both of whom hold DMQ level1 & 2 (Fit and Comp register & Trained Hunter Status), along with First Aid, Manual Handling, Deer Prep and Larder work and ATV certification.

Easter Ross Deer Management Group

Mid Fearn

Interests	Hectares	% of Group Area
<u>Sheep & Cattle Farming, Renewables, Residential letting and fish farming.</u>	<u>5260</u>	<u>26%</u>

Three persons are employed part time, two of whom hold DMQ level 1 & 2 (Fit & Comp register & trained Hunter Status). All three have undergone Lantra ATW training and hold first aid certificates.

Gledfield

Interests	Hectares	% of Group Area
<u>Sporting Estate with Woodland and Salmon Fishing</u>	<u>2825</u>	<u>14%</u>

The estate has one full time person responsible for deer management who is DMQ level1 & 2 qualified.

Dounie

Interests	Hectares	% of Group Area
<u>Sporting & Crofting Estate, Salmon Fishing, Forestry and holiday letting</u>	<u>600</u>	<u>3%</u>

Easter Ross Deer Management Group

The estate employs one full time person to manage the deer along with other estate duties. The Deer manager holds a full DMQ level 1 qualification. They are also holders of certification in the use of ATVs.

Gruinards

Interests	Hectares	% of Group Area
<u>Sporting & Crofting Estate, Fishing and holiday letting</u>	<u>1782</u>	<u>9%</u>

The Estate has one full time person employed to manage deer who is DMQ level 1 qualified and has trained in first aid, along with ATV use.

Glencalvie

Interests	Hectares	% of Group Area
<u>Sporting Estate, Salomon fishing and holiday letting</u>	<u>1620</u>	<u>8%</u>

The estate employs two full time and one part time persons to manage the deer. All hold DMQ level 1 and two hold DMQ level 2 certificates. All staff engaged in deer management hold ATV certification.

Collective competence of group staff and contractors.

The group has eleven persons employed in the management of deer on a full and part time basis. Of the eleven, six are trained to DMQ level 2 with trained hunter status, and 5 are trained to DMQ level 1. The target for the group is to ensure that through collaborative efforts all personal engaged in deer management are trained to DMQ level 2.

Section 2 – The Aims & Objectives of Group Deer Management

Objectives for Collaborative Management

All participating members of the ERDMG will individually and collectively take a measure of responsibility for, the welfare and management, of the wild deer population within the boundaries of the group area. This should be done in a sustainable way, and in consideration of the natural environment and habitat that forms the base of the deer hefting areas.

This is primarily made up of the open hill range of mixed heather moorland, blanket bog, peatlands, and localised use of woodland, to provide shelter and mixed environment for the deer use.

These types of habitats are naturally favorable land types for both Red & Roe deer and particularly in this groups case, the relatively low height of the hill ranges hosting wild deer, combined with the local climatic conditions, that prevail within in the inner Moray Firth area with a low average rainfall, and lower than average periods of snow cover on the land, provides for habitat which wild deer populations are given to thriving on.

Given the above, all members of the group recognize that the management of the group wild deer population, requires commitment in terms of resource to ensure that the population is maintained at a level, which allows the continuing habitat conditions and levels of bio diversity to be maintained or improved whilst not impacting negatively, on the other land uses and users, who share the open group range, whilst also ensuring that there are no significant failures, to the private or public interest within the group boundaries.

The average annual cull within the group area over the last 5 years is 360 deer of all species. This equates to a deer cull per Sq km of 2.58, which is an increase from the baseline of the plan commencement and sees the overall deer population per Sq Km reduced to a figure of just under 14 deer, across the open deer range.

This has been cross checked by an aerial deer count by the use of helicopter, which was undertaken on 23rd December 2022.

The group are considering how the implementation of the Scot Gov deer review outcomes, along with an ongoing program of habitat monitoring, group wide, will impact on their deer density aims in the coming months.

Proactive and positive deer management has a direct bearing on the provision of local employment and economic stimulus to the communities bounded by the group. Employment provided in the management of wild deer both directly, and indirectly, makes an extremely valuable contribution to the local economy.

A large proportion of the economic benefits are derived from the letting of much of the deer stalking, on a commercial basis with 6 of the 7 group members stating that deer is one of the fundamental underwriters of staff costs in relation to the sustainable management, of what is a valuable wild resource.

Sustainable Deer Management

Sustainable Deer Management can be best described as the management of wild deer to obtain the optimum mix of benefit, economically and environmentally whilst giving regard to the people and communities and the habitat range impacted by deer.

The overarching aim of the ERDMG is to ensure that the populations of wild deer found within the group area are managed sustainably for the economic, cultural and ecological benefit which should be combined with delivery of public benefit.

This will be done by all members of the group who will ensure that proper management of the wild deer is undertaken, to ensure the health of the deer, the protection of the local ecology and natural environment, and to deliver continuity for jobs and services which revolve around wild deer.

Annual culls will be carried out efficiently and professionally whilst taking due regard for the welfare of the deer and for the safety of the general public. This will be guided by use of the Scottish Government approved Code of Deer Management along with the use of best practice guides, produced by Nature.scot or other organisations as statutorily authorised.

The deer management plan for this group will be made available on a group web page linked to the Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG) website. It will also be circulated to the community councils along with other community and public interest groups connected to the geographic group area.

High Standards of Deer management competency.

The group recognise the need for high standards of competence within the deer management sector and accordingly within the ERDMG.

Deer welfare is of fundamental importance to the DMG. It is recognised by the group that robust deer recruitment counts, play an important part in understanding the measurement of the welfare of the wild deer within the group range, and as such the group will be undertaking an annual recruitment count.

The figure produced will have an important part to play in regard to the population modelling of the deer within the group area. Deer larder weights will continue to be recorded and used as a tool in identifying the overall health and welfare of the wild deer.

Information gleaned by the group members on natural deer mortality will also assist in helping the group provide a robust population modelling procedure, linked to the habitat and environment within the wider group area.

Training

The DMG will encourage the attainment of all available sector qualifications, suitable for the delivery of professional deer management by persons engaged in deer management within the group area, along with Continued Professional development using Best Practice Guidance and other available courses. Deer management qualifications should always exist to promote high standards of delivery in the management of wild deer.

All persons charged with culling deer will possess a recognized industry qualification with the minimum requirement being Deer Management Qualification Level 1 (DMQ1), with an aim for all those culling deer to achieve DMQ 2 within the lifetime of the plan.

All group members will make full use of best practice guides, produced by SNH to ensure high standards of deer management are maintained. For staff who are required to cull deer under special authorizations there will be a requirement for them to be on the SNH fit & competent register.

The potential for training delivery, via the group, will be investigated and where identified will be pursued including any possibilities for training through public funding.

Given the above, it should however be recognised that staff within the DMG area already have a wide variety of other qualifications and certificates covering other aspects of their work. These include ATV, Argocat, First Aid, Chainsaw, Health & safety. There is a strong ethos of training and staff improvement across many of the properties within the DMG.

Venison

The retail sales of venison are currently going through a period of growth in the home market. Great efforts have been made by Scottish Quality Wild Venison, (SQWV) to place the product in the housewives' eye and we now have periods when the demand is struggling to be met. The ERDMG currently culls an average of 320+ carcasses per annum. The gross economic value of the group venison sales amounts to a sum of approximately **£29,000.00** per annum.

The larder facilities within the management group members vary within the acceptable scale and each member has their own vision for their facilities. However, this is negated somewhat as Ardgay Game, who is now one of the leading independent game dealers and purveyors of wild venison operating in Scotland, have a purpose-built handling and processing unit based in Ardgay.

This is less than 6 miles from four of the seven group members, and it is common practice for some of these members to transport carcasses directly to Ardgay game facilities on completion of carcass dressing.

This represents a significant saving in providing facilities, their maintenance, running and upkeep, as well as reduced carbon emissions. All group members recognise that Ardgay game is a significant employer in terms of the local community and therefore there are mutual benefits in the current operating structures.

Land Use Objectives

Agricultural Land

Although the 5-year cull records for the group show a minimal return of Roe deer it is known that on the improved agricultural land to the south of the deer group, there are pockets of Roe deer which may impact and cause damage to cereal crops. Current group members report minimal damage and impact to agricultural activities from deer. This will be due in part to the investment in fencing by group members to protect productive land. Within the group boundaries deer and sheep live in harmony, with little impacted consequence being seen.

This is mitigated by stock management on the hill range where sheep are moved onto the lower grassland and improved hill ground during the summer & autumn months. It should also be noted that the sheep & deer density numbers are held at reasonably low numbers within the group area.

As a beneficial consequence of the 3 yearly recurring habitat monitoring of land occupied both species, members will over time be enabled to understand fully the impacts of agricultural livestock in comparison to the wild deer herd on the natural environment within the group, and it may be that their objectives for both will be amended.

Crofting

The group members to the North of the group area (Gledfield, Dounie & Gruinards) which are based in the Carron basin have instances of shared land use where the deer have a shared use of crofting common grazing grounds. In practice this has limited impact on the wild deer population and it is understood from local knowledge that there is minimal evidence of deer being shot on croft land.

Almost all the croft ground within the group area is protected by deer fencing either as direct control or inadvertently where croft land is bounded by enclosed woodland. Members of the group impacted by crofting land tenure have rigorous fencing maintenance schedules within the individual estate management objective which harmonies with the objective of the deer management group

Forestry

The following table provides information taken from the National Forest Inventory which identifies forestry interests within the group area including woodland type and % of cover in terms of the group's overall area. This includes the woodland interests of the group members where it exists.

The group boundary has a sizeable area of land under woodland, with this being predominantly divided between the public forestry body, Forestry and land Scotland, (FCS) who at this juncture are not members of the group (but do attend group meetings and share population and cull data) and private forestry interests of shared ownership (but joint management) to the north east of the group area.

Attempts have been made to engage with the management organisation of this woodland area, including the issuing of a public interest questionnaire but at the time of the draft plan production, no response has been received.

Easter Ross Deer Management Group

The group would welcome and has encouraged group membership to both the public and private forestry interests within the group area and Forestry & land Scotland are now a full and active member.

The following table shows the groups woodland total which currently excludes land & Forestry Scotland estate. The extent of this is currently being measured and will be added to the group total in the near future.

Woodland Type	Area (Hectares)	Area as a % of group
Broadleaved	153	1%
Conifer	2681	13%
Felled & Ground Prep	306	2%
Young Trees	247	1%
Assumed woodland	311	1.5%
Other	55	.5%
Total	3742	19%

It is recognised that the majority of the woodlands detailed above are enclosed with fencing, which is generally deer proof, but there will undoubtedly be inward and outward migration of wild deer from these woodlands. All group members have a responsibility to ensure that deer fencing, where it has an impact on the deer group plan, is maintained in deer proof condition.

Individual group members have recently created native woodland areas under the woodland expansion program promoted by Forestry & Land Scotland. All of these areas are securely fenced with new deer fencing.

Group members will ensure that consideration is given to the creation of native woodland cover where habitat and the wider objectives of the individual estate management policies allow.

The group members have collectively over the last 20 years created new native woodland extending to almost 1000 Ha, which contributes to the national objectives and targets for woodland creation. The group through its individual members will continue to assess opportunities for woodland creation and where this fits with the overall objectives of the individual members, woodland will be created. Where match funding can be secured, the DMG will undertake to quantify the remaining scope for additional woodland within the group and undertake a strategic review of where this might best serve both the public, group and individual members' interests

It is recognised that within the group geographical area there are 800 Ha of native woodland where there is herbivore pressure recorded as medium or high. In most of these areas there are little or no deer numbers present. The main use of this land area is crofting. The group will engage with local grazing committees wherever possible, to assist in reducing any grazing pressure caused by deer and consider opportunities for reducing overall herbivore pressure.

One group member has small areas of unfenced conifer woodland which has been opened to provide shelter and alternative habitat for the wild deer. This native woodland is largely Scot Pine, and will be retained for the long term. Regeneration opportunities within this woodland are currently limited due to the almost complete woodland canopy at present.

Given that the largest proportion of woodland is owned out with current group membership and is of a commercial nature, it is unlikely that there will be significant tree habitat open to wild deer for at least 20 years.

Within the deer group area there are pockets of native woodland cover. Most of this cover sits out with the enclosed open hill range where the main deer populous are located. However, as part of the DMP these areas, most of which are regulated for the working interests of group members, and the management of them will also become a group collaborative management task.

Where match funding can be secured, the group will undertake to review the management of these native woodlands, monitor their current condition and develop and programme to secure their long-term management.

The management priority for woodlands in the area will be to secure and improve the condition of designated and ancient woodlands, and to try and improve connectivity of these where possible. Where necessary the group, through the individual members, will encourage the use of deer fencing where woodland creation is being carried out.

Habitat assessment

Land Cover Scotland map (LCS 88) shows that the habitat of the group area is diverse with a range of cover present. The larger cover areas are heather moorland at 8450 ha, blanket bog and peatlands at 6545 ha, woodland cover at 3700 ha and unproved grassland at 1286 ha. Other habitat such as mountain vegetation (139 ha), recently ploughed land (360 ha), coarse grassland, water, quarries and bracken can be found, but in localised small areas across the group area.

Land Cover Scotland 88 Map.

Land Cover	Hectares	% of Group
Heather Moorland	8,450	42
Blanket bog & Peatlands	6,545	33
Conifer Woodland	3,100	15
Native Woodland	500	2.5
Unimproved grassland	1,286	7
Other	250	0.5
Total	20,131	100

Deer are dependent on the habitat as well as impacting on it. By measuring and recording the impacts of deer on habitat condition, it makes it easier to monitor whether land management objectives are being achieved. There are agricultural activities taking place across reasonable areas of the wild deer range which will be evaluated during the lifespan of this plan through the monitoring program which is now in place.

The group will manage deer impacts on the habitat by maintaining an agreed deer density per square km, using deer fencing if necessary and also by managing other livestock interests within their individual units, to ensure that impacts are mitigated wherever possible.

There are also public objectives associated with land, either through designated site status or areas where biodiversity is felt to be particularly important. Ongoing assessment will be carried out by group members and the collected data will be shared amongst group members in order to identify any areas facing increased pressure, and steps will be taken to mitigate any negative impacts by implementing appropriate management processes.

The two main upland habitats will be monitored on a running 3 year cycle, with interventions if necessary, for herbivore impacts, on dwarf shrub heath as this is likely to provide winter fodder for deer and thereby have a real impact on their winter survival, and blanket bog, as this habitat is fragile and most commonly impacted by trampling.

The group recognise that they have a collective responsibility to improve carbon storage. They recognise that the existing woodland and moorland habitat serves a very necessary purpose in this respect. The group will monitor conditions throughout the duration of the plan and will identify opportunities to increase the group's carbon storage capacity through various means such as peatland restoration and the creation of new woodlands. Where match funding can be secured, the group will instigate a study of the potential for peatland restoration and provide information for Peatland Action scheme applications where appropriate.

All members of the group will ensure responsible muirburn and will follow statutory guidance, whilst working with other land use objectives to ensure that the habitat environment of the group remains in good condition. The group will avoid the burning of moorland in areas of deep peat.

Peatland damage across the group area is considered in some localised areas, to be a medium or high risk, however restoration opportunities are being explored by the group through the individual group members and where possible support through the Peatland Action funding schemes will be sought to assist in peatland restoration.

Some of the group members are already active through their wider estate interests in river basin management and the group consulted with two fisheries trusts during the production of this plan.

All group members recognise the need for good river basin and water catchment management and are willing contributors in the efforts to sustain the river basin management within the DMG area.

Designated and Protected sites

Special Area of Conservation (SAC). In the north east corner, the group boundary is linked to the Kyle of Sutherland, the confluence that merges the central Sutherland rivers. The Oykel SAC stretches onto the group geographical area at this point and the extent within the group boundaries is 2.4 ha. This area incorporated is agricultural land and is out with the area recognised as the range of the group's wild deer population.

Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The Struie Channels SSSI is situated on either side of the B9175 Struie road which acts as the group boundary. The SSSI is almost all found on the eastern side of the roadway. The host area is under the ownership of FCS who are currently not members of the group. Dialog is underway to encourage this public landowner to join the group.

Special Protection Area (SPA). The Morangie Forest SPA bounds the group area at the south east of the group area. The SPA focuses on the survival of a small population of Capercaillie. The predominant land cover within the SPA is woodland and the designation extends to only 0.4 ha into the group area on land owned by the FCS.

National Scenic Area (NSA). The boundary of the Dornoch firth national scenic area (NSA) interlinks with the boundary of the ERDMG geographical area and the fringe of

the group in this area is included within the NSA. The NSA special qualities are the distinctive and contrasting outlooks to the east and west and include:

- Diversity of woodland cover;
- Tranquil and undeveloped coastline;
- Inhabited surrounds with a wider backdrop of hills and Muir.

The ERDMP worked into practice, plays a role in enhancing many of the qualities that are highlighted within the NSA. Forestry and habitat form a big part of the groups' management plan, and therefore the group has already encapsulated how it will deliver on maintaining the favorable condition of the NSA.

Economic benefits

The group recognises that there are economic benefits to be derived from the wild deer herd both for individual members and for the wider community. The group will pro-actively promote the use of local services and industries that are in a position to support the deer groups activities.

The group members currently cull an average of 75 Red deer stags per annum. All of which are shot with sporting guests, with significant economic benefit to the local community as well as the group members, through the letting of stag stalking to sporting guests. It is thought that the letting of the stalking and the accommodation provision provides a minimum income to the local area over a 5–6 week period in the autumn of around **£47,000.**

The costs of the management of the wild deer found within the group are captured by the members individually, on a property-by-property basis and these include the costs of staff, the cost of machinery and equipment required to carry out the management and culling of the wild deer herd, in a safe and professional manner that adheres to industry best practice guidance.

The group has carried out an exercise to evaluate the collective capital costs of wild deer management to the group in a manner which they will in the near future provide a fuller economic detail but that cost is now estimated to be in the region of **£165,000.00** annually.

Public Benefit

There are many ways in which to measure the public benefit of wild deer in Scotland. Red deer are recognised as an integral component of the land management mosaic within upland areas. Their revenue producing capability provides a very direct benefit, in the maintenance and support of fragile rural communities through direct and secondary employment.

Wild deer have economic impacts on not just the businesses which hold a direct responsibility for their welfare and good management, but also for the wider rural communities where wild deer can be found. Throughout the year people from outwith these communities have an engagement with deer which directly impacts on both the deer and these communities, which provides positive benefits but also has the potential to deliver some negatives. This plan is formulated on the basis of minimising the potential negative impacts.

As part of the process of evaluating public benefit the group recognise that the current deer management structure within the uplands of Scotland provides significant benefit to the public in that the self-regulation, whilst not completely without weakness, has served the industry well, particularly over the last 20+ years when the structure and framework has improved through the hard work and commitment of the ADMG who have been aided and guided by the Deer Commission, SNH and now nature.scot.

The good welfare of deer both at individual animal and herd levels can provide excellent public benefits and the group, through this management plan, will endeavor

to monitor the health of the deer herd to protect vulnerable animals and through selective culling maintain a balanced cross aged herd.

By managing the deer numbers and maintaining the current low density levels the group will ensure the habitat conditions within the group area retain and improve their favorable status, and so ensure a continuing resilient food chain for the wild deer herd and thereby the vulnerability of the deer in harsh environmental conditions.

As a part of the consultation process for the drafting of the group Deer Management Plan, LCS Ltd engaged with number community councils, community groups and bodies, along with land occupiers and grazing committees within the group boundary.

The DMG recognises the importance of public engagement and the desire for a higher level of engagement with the general public to ensure the maximum public benefit from the wild deer in Scotland, it could be assumed from the level of engagement that there is a satisfaction in the current performance, and actions of the deer management group.

Broadly the engagement with the public, via the group has identified a positive outlook toward the current system of deer management although give the group is intent on undertaking the following to raise the profile of deer and their benefits within the group area:

The group will increase its engagement with other land holders within the groups geographical area. It will attempt to improve the recruitment of its direct membership, particularly with the public and private forestry land owners and agricultural property occupiers who have direct impacts with deer.

It will form a line of communication with community councils along with individuals and community groups who have an interest in the work of the group, and all community councils will be invited to attend DMG meetings.

The minutes of all meetings will be published on the ERDMG web page which is linked from the ADMG website, as will be the ratified Deer Group plan along with any other relevant information relating the group and deer management within it.

Wild Deer & Road Traffic Incidents

The ERDMG is bounded significantly by Public roads on three sides. Two of these roads are single track, unclassified and not through roads (Ardross to Strathruisdale) & (Ardgay to Croick). The nature and structure of these two roads is such that traffic speed is ordinarily restricted, to significantly below the national speed limits. It is also recognised that the traffic using these roads is fundamentally local, and there is therefore a greater understanding of the potential for road vehicle collisions with deer of all three species. The group encourages the reporting of any such incidents and is not aware of any problems in regard to deer encroaching the highways leading to collisions.

The B9176 Struie road acts as the boundary for the group. It is deer fenced for its entirety, on either one or two sides, with the exception of where it passes through FCS land, which has a cattle grid on the boundary to tie in with the woodland boundary fencing. Although there are deer on the “outside” of the boundary fence, the numbers are very limited with the possible exception of within the FCS area.

The group is not aware of any road traffic incidents relating to deer, but within the groups proposed communications activities there will be liaison between the group and Police Scotland on an occasional basis and deer related RTAs will be included on any meeting agendas. Maintaining the east boundary fence will be key to maintaining the current low incidence of DVCs and the DMG will consider and plan for its maintenance.

Communications Policy

The ERDMG is committed to the transparent communication of all relevant information to its members, to government agencies and to the public more widely, with the caveat that some sensitive data will be distributed to group members only.

The primary source of information about the Group will be on the Association of Deer Management Groups' (ADMG) website, on which all information relevant to the group can be located. This will include the Deer Management Plan and associated maps, a constitution, minutes of group meetings, and population models.

All local Community Councils, Common Grazing Committees and other relevant interests will be made aware of meetings in advance and invited to contribute to the agenda for these.

When appropriate, the Group will also publise its work, management and articles of interest within the local newspapers.

The points of contact for the group will be the Secretary and the Chairperson.

The communications policy will be reviewed on a regular basis to take into account the needs of the DMG.

Section 3, Culling & Census information etc.

Deer Populations

The principle species of deer which is resident within the group area is Red deer. There are very small numbers of roe deer to the south and north and also small pockets of Sika deer. It is recognised that there is a demand for the sporting hunting of Sika deer, and where this exists, group members are encouraged to utilise this, whilst ensuring that their actions are not providing encouragement to the expansion of the Sika range.

This objective should not necessarily impact on the groups primary management objectives as in most cases evidence of Roe and Sika deer are generally encountered in areas that lie out with the groups almost totally enclosed wild deer range. The evidence of Sika deer on the groups' fringes provides a motivation for the group, to ensure that the existing deer fencing is maintained.

The ERDMG is almost unique amongst deer management groups in that its boundaries are almost fully enclosed by deer fencing; it is in effect a closed group. This provides that where management plans in regard to culls which are based on accurate counting of deer and also recording of recruitment numbers are adhered to, the deer density within the deer group boundaries should show little by variation on a year-by-year basis.

It is vitally important to the group that the boundary fence is maintained, and each member should bear the responsibility for its own area. Any significant breaches in the boundary fencing should be reported via the group secretary, and dialog between members should ensure timely repairs.

Easter Ross Deer Management Group

Red Deer Helicopter Count 2022

Property	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Total	Area H	Density km2
Strathrusdale	39	162	28	229	2710	11.8
Crannich	40	119	21	180	1641	9.1
Midfearn	213	340	95	648	4639	14.0
Gledfield	97	120	33	250	1213	20.6
Dounie	119	21	4	144	934	15.4
Gruinards	30	226	89	345	1820	19.0
Glencalvie	<u>7</u>	<u>52</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>75</u>	<u>1213</u>	<u>6.2</u>
	<i>545</i>	<i>1040</i>	<i>242</i>	<i>1827</i>	13387	<i>13.6</i>

Group Cull Figures (5 years)

	<u>Stag</u>	<u>Hind</u>	<u>Calf</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>2017-18</u>	84	314	69	471
<u>2018-19</u>	62	158	51	271
<u>2019-20</u>	71	228	55	354
<u>2020-21</u>	63	171	57	291
<u>2021-22</u>	85	241	84	410
<u>Total</u>	<u>365</u>	<u>1112</u>	<u>316</u>	<u>1793</u>
<u>Average</u>	<u>73</u>	<u>225</u>	<u>64</u>	<u>362</u>

As can be derived from the table, the culling figures have been reasonably stable, with the average cull being influenced by recruitment counting in Spring. With regard to the hind cull, some of the years showing lower than average culls can be linked to years with periods of severe winter weather, which reflected a higher than normal winter mortality.

There is no doubt that one of the main reasons for a continuing consistency in yearly culling average can in a largely be attributed to the lack of inward or outward migration of the wild deer in the group area.

There are sporadic cull return records from private forestry interests within the group area who do not partake in group membership. These deer have been culled out with the current recognised open hill range which is secured by deer fencing. Where figures have been submitted, they account for on average 8-9% of the deer cull.

Roe & Sika deer Populations

There is little evidence of Roe deer presence within the main open hill group area. There are pockets of roe deer to the south of the group on the improved arable farmland. The Group takes the view that roe deer should be managed, and where there is evidence of damage to crops, trees or habitat the policy will be for low population retention.

Small pockets of Sika deer are located across the group area but mainly in the north & south where they are found on the edge of the open hill range and in woodland. The Group have a policy of reduction of Sika give that they are recognised as an invasive species.

However, there can be a demand for stalking of Sika stags and whilst maintaining the Group's policy, the group members are encouraged to maximize this economic benefit.

Appendix

1. Group Constitution
2. Population Model
3. Group Maps (provided by SNH)
 - a. Land Cover Scotland (LCS 88)
 - b. National Woodland Scotland Herbivore Pressure
 - c. Woodland Creation Schemes
 - d. National Forest Inventory Woodlands
 - e. Designated Sites