

Appendix 8 – Deer Management Plan (DMP)

1. Introduction

Strathnairn Community Woodlands (SCW) comprise two small woods located in Farr, Strathnairn approx 11 miles south of Inverness. Both woods are ex-FC plantations planted during the 1950s and purchased by the community in 2003. School Wood (approx 12ha) is predominantly Scots Pine and Milton Wood (approx 28ha) is mixed conifers with 4.5 ha of restocked broadleaves (Planted 2005) along the riparian zone of the River Nairn.

The first community Woodland Management Plan started in 2003 and included replacement of degraded fences with rabbit fencing, establishment of a network of paths, restocking in the felled riparian areas, deer management and a number of habitat monitoring and diversification projects. This plan lapsed in 2009 and the current Trustees are in the process of drawing up a new Forest Plan to ensure continuity of management for the future. This will involve some small areas of clear felling, and some continuous cover thinning / regeneration. The Trustees recognise that it will be essential for the long term success of achieving these objectives to establish a good, workable system for deer population monitoring and management.

2. Policy Statement

The Trustees will undertake woodland management in accordance with SNH Code of Practice on Deer Management (2011) and Forestry Commission Technical Guidance for Woodland Improvement Grant for reducing deer impact version 4 (April 2011). Regeneration / restocking will be monitored and managed to meet the guidelines set out in Forestry Standard Technical Guidance for Woodland Creation – Native Woodland Natural Regeneration (RP22301E)

3. Objectives

The primary objective of the DMP is to manage the deer population to secure the stated objectives of the Forest Plan.

The main objectives of the Forest Plan are to conserve, regenerate and promote the restoration of native woodland habitat and the biodiversity of flora and fauna whilst providing open public access and promoting cultural and educational use of the woods. This will be achieved by gradually breaking up the even age structure and regenerating felled non-native areas with a good balance of Scots pine and native broadleaves. However retention of some mature non-native trees and low levels of non-native regeneration will be tolerated to maximise and encourage biodiversity e.g. Norway spruce to support red squirrel population.

4. Constraints

There are plentiful seed sources locally but the pace of change will be affected by the stability of the existing crop, getting the right balance between light levels, cultivation, deer damage & population levels, public access and the need to gradually develop a more natural structure to the mature woodland as the riparian restocking develops towards thicket stage.

5. Audit

1.1 Habitat info

1.1.1 Milton Wood: The majority of the woodland is in late pole stage with the exception of the riparian zone. This was planted in 2004/5 in tree shelters and has established well, supplemented by copious birch, alder and rowan regeneration. It is presently showing only low levels of impacts from deer and will develop into a large area of dense thicket which will then provide additional cover for deer in the future. Regenerating felled areas may become increasingly difficult as a result, and these vulnerable crops together with the general flora throughout the wood will need to be closely monitored for impacts by deer over the life of the plan. Adjacent land use is primarily grazing for sheep and cattle.

1.1.2 School Wood: This wood is a very open, even age, late pole stage Scots pine plantation with a small open boggy area in the centre. The drains in this area have been blocked up to help maintain this biodiversity and conserve a number of moss and lichen species. The back (west) boundary is rough grass / moorland used for sheep grazing and the other boundaries are gardens and a public road. The whole area is very well used for recreation and is frequently disturbed.

1.2 Deer population

Formal assessments have not been carried out in recent years but recent use of the woodland deer density indicator chart suggests existing density levels are low-medium.

In School wood there are good levels of rowan and some birch regeneration around the edges, however Scots pine regeneration is very limited, mainly to areas where there has been soil disturbance. Sightings of individual roe deer are common, although tracks are difficult to find. Pellet groups are evident particularly towards the back boundary where the broadleaved regeneration is showing significant fraying damage in places.

In Milton Wood sightings of small groups of roe are common. In the riparian area, in addition to the restocking in tree shelters, there is extensive alder, rowan and birch regeneration showing very little sign of deer impacts. In the main woodland area, in addition to healthy broadleaved regeneration there are also strong pockets of Norway and Sitka spruce regeneration showing only low levels of impact by deer. Pellet groups are evident but defined deer tracks are hard to find. Sika/red deer have not been observed in SCW. Monitoring will identify if any are present.

1.3 Other herbivores – rabbits, sheep & cattle

The new rabbit fencing and fence maintenance carried out in the previous plan period has virtually eliminated grazing by rabbits and sheep. Occasionally cattle can cross the river when water levels are low but neighbour relations are good and regeneration plentiful so this has not been a major problem. External population control resulted in a major reduction in the rabbit population in 2011.

1.4 Biodiversity Priorities

To break up the even aged structure and return areas presently under exotics to native woodland; to protect Red Squirrel habitat; to restore the riparian zones; to identify and take opportunities to increase general habitat provision when opportunities arise e.g. installing bird / bat boxes and by monitoring changes in the ground flora.

1.5 Designations & Access issues

Both community woodlands provide complete freedom for public access.

1.5.1 Milton Wood is at one end of Farr on the other side of the road to a small group of houses with only two direct residential neighbours. It is mostly set back from the public road and mainly bounded by the river and agricultural grazing. It has a small car park and an extensive network of public paths.

1.5.2 School Wood is in the middle of Farr alongside a busy B road in close proximity to a village play area, it has several residential neighbours as well as the local primary school. It links into a wider network of paths from Inverarnie and has a large car park, a small internal play area and a forest cabin. Several of the properties access the wood directly from their gardens and there is also a gate out onto the moor / rough grazing that runs along the along the back (west) boundary.

1.6 Social / Economic info

No road safety issues have been reported regarding deer.

Good relations with neighbouring landowners – no problems with deer reported.

6. Setting Targets & Monitoring

6.1 Targets

The target for restocking on felled areas and for new planting is to have at least 75% of these areas restocked with species native to locality, averaging 1600 healthy trees per hectare over 0.3m in height and in a condition capable of continued growth within the first 5 years. For natural regeneration, the average minimum stocking density at Year 5 is 1100 trees per hectare.

Where this looks unlikely to be achieved due to deer damage this will trigger appropriate management e.g. fencing and/or culling. The trigger threshold for considering culling will either be when deer issues are reported by neighbours or if restocking / regeneration standards are unlikely to be met by Year 5.

Regular informal liaison with adjoining landowners will be undertaken to monitor whether there are neighbour issues regarding deer management in the surrounding area. Present population levels do not cause our neighbours problems. Where known, incidents of road accidents involving deer will be recorded.

6.2 Monitoring

On the wider areas regenerating gradually under continuous cover where the biodiversity of ground flora is also of interest the following impact assessments will be undertaken based on the advice given in FC Research Bulletins:

- 128 - Estimating deer abundance in woodlands: the combination plot technique by Graeme Swanson, Helen Armstrong, Douglas Campbell, 2008.
- 108 - Monitoring vegetation changes in conservation management of forests by Gordon S Patterson, 1992.

6.2.1 Deer population assessment

A baseline assessment of population size and welfare needs to be established before felling takes place and repeated annually using transects and the combination plot technique to assess dung, browsing, stripping and fraying. The objective is to ensure the population levels do not develop into deer welfare issues as the habitat, particularly thicket stage growth, develops across the course of the plan. Local volunteers, trained by an experienced deer controller, will carry out this work.

6.2.2 Deer Damage assessment

An annual assessment of general woodland areas described in 6.2.1 combined with annual monitoring of specific vulnerable restocked areas to assess whether regeneration is developing at sufficient density to achieve the target stocking density standards will be carried out.

7. Actions

7.1 Monitoring

Annual monitoring will be undertaken by community volunteers and records will be retained.

7.2 Culling

If any problems do develop then additional advice will be sought from FC/SNH. If culling becomes necessary this will be undertaken in liaison with neighbouring landowners. Full advice from FC/SNH will be taken before proceeding to ensure all aspects of deer welfare and public safety have been considered. All work will be carried out by an agreed and approved competent controller. Records will be maintained as required by best practice advice.

8. Review Timings

Annual review by SCW of monitoring results regarding deer population and damage levels to assess and plan ongoing management and maintenance actions.

A full review of this Deer Management Plan will take place after 5 years (2017).