

The Draft Strategy for Wild Deer in Scotland

A response from the Forestry Policy Group

The Forestry Policy Group (FPG) comprises individuals and organisations committed to environmentally sensitive forestry which provides economic and social benefit. FPG members include woodland organisations and independent forestry professionals.

The Forestry Policy Group :-

Welcomes :

1) The small number of critical prescriptive sentences in the Draft Deer Strategy, that relate directly to woodland and forestry interests : eg

“...minimizing any adverse impacts of wild deer on nature and natural systems”

“... minimizing any adverse impacts of wild deer on other land uses”.

“...secure an appropriate balance of desirable deer numbers and impacts.”

“The grazing, trampling and browsing effects of wild deer will be managed to maintain an appropriate vegetation cover”.

These could form a basis for an effective Strategy with the potential to deliver the reductions of deer populations necessary to the sustainable development of nearly all other upland land uses in Scotland, particularly multiple-objective forestry.

2) The introduction of the concepts of *“integrated ecosystem management”* and *“landscape scale management”* which have the potential to set the current absence of sustainable deer management within its proper context bringing far reaching economic and ecological advantages to rural areas as well as contributing to Scotland's carbon savings target.

Is critical of :

1) Failure to acknowledge the extent of the ‘deer problem’ particularly in relation to existing forest and woodland damage and the potential for future expansion by both planting and natural regeneration. It draws insufficient attention to the deteriorating situation in terms of increasing deer numbers of all species and makes no attempt to quantify this or to elaborate on the opportunity cost to forestry and woodland management or any other land use.

2) A change from assessment of deer numbers from population counts to *“an assessment of impacts in any area”* without proper assessment of these impacts, both economic and ecological and agreed criteria for *“appropriate”* vegetation cover.

3) Failure to acknowledge the ongoing loss of remnant semi-natural woodland outwith fenced enclosures even since the last deer strategy, the loss of local biodiversity this involves and the lost potential for natural regeneration of degraded habitats.

4) Failure to give proper consideration to alternative management systems for culling deer including licensing systems and Tradeable Hunting Obligations.

5) A lack of integration with SFS and SCCP objectives in terms of woodland expansion. There is a lack of clarity of how the Draft Deer Strategy integrates with and helps to deliver these other two Strategies.

Recommends :

1) Development of integrated upland land use strategy for Scotland that places multiple-objective forestry and woodland restoration at the centre of agricultural, climate change, biodiversity and rural development strategies.

2) Meaningful and explicit targets for deer population (all species) reductions throughout the country coupled to scientifically based assessment of deer impacts on natural vegetation, particularly natural regeneration of woodland which might allow the delivery of the SFS.

3) A proper assessment of the damage to forestry in economic terms due to deer and a major study of the 'extra' cost of achieving SFS goals of the mid and long term with current deer numbers. This will include assessment of all the practical silvicultural difficulties, loss of timber quality and potential for species diversification.

4) A detailed study of the negative impact of deer on the possibilities of growing trees especially broadleaves for quality timber crops (with reference to Forestry Commission Scotland's Timber Development Programme. Key Objective D of this programme gives priority to implementing the recommendations of the Growing Quality Broadleaves working group).

5) A detailed study of the opportunity cost to potential non-timber forest crops of current high deer populations.

6) A much broader input into policy formulation for deer management particularly the cross-disciplinary scientific input that will be required to formulate integrated ecosystem management strategy.
