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BETTER
WOODLANDS
FOR WALES

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Grants and support for creating
and improving woodlands

Approach to Deer Management

Introduction

Six species of deer live wild in Britain today and red, roe, fallow, muntjac and a few red/sika hybrids occur in Wales. The numbers of deer are increasing and in some parts of Wales they have a major impact on the environmental and economic value of woodlands. Deer often eat young trees, preventing the establishment of new woodlands or the natural regeneration of existing woodlands. They can also severely browse the shrub layer and graze the wild plants that are an important component of native woodlands.

They have no natural predators and so deer numbers may need to be controlled in some areas to keep them in balance with their habitat and prevent serious damage. The deer themselves may suffer poor health if their numbers are greater than the habitat can support.

The management of deer requires a sound understanding of their behaviour and impact, as well as the legal issues relating to their management.

The purpose of this document is to provide woodland owners, Management Planners, Wales Deer Initiative (WDI), and Forestry Commission Wales (FCW) staff with an overview of the way that Better Woodlands for Wales (BWW) deals with deer management issues.

Definitions

The **UK Woodland Assurance Standard** (UKWAS standard) is an independent certification standard for verifying sustainable forest and woodland management in the United Kingdom. Woodland owners can achieve certification for their woodlands if they gain independent verification that they are complying with the standard.

BWW Approach to Deer Management

The requirements of BWW are based on the UKWAS standard (see Further Information). The UKWAS standard states that where there is a significant problem caused by deer, a written plan is required to identify the management objectives aimed at limiting the impact of deer.

Woodland owners entering into BWW must ensure that where deer are present, they do not cause serious damage to the woodlands. BWW provides support in order to help owners and agents to manage deer responsibly, effectively and in line with best practice. The support comes in the form of assistance, from the WDI, in the planning of deer management, including inventory, and in grant aid for the infrastructure needed to manage deer effectively.

Owners of small woodlands are likely to face problems caused by deer that are part of a larger population living mainly outside their property. BWW seeks to encourage landowners to collaborate with neighbours in order to manage deer by establishing, and/or taking part in, local Deer Management Groups (DMGs). Participation in DMGs would involve things like exchanging information and setting joint cull targets. The WDI will advise owners on whether there is a DMG in their area which could help them to manage the deer population. Where there is an active DMG, FCW would expect those owners in BWW to participate in the group.

Planning Process

Where wild deer are having a significant impact on woodland, or are likely to do so in the near future, they will be identified by the Management Planner as an issue in the Foundation Plan. On these sites BWW will fund the WDI to prepare a Deer Management Assessment (DMA) in liaison with the owner and the Planner. On larger holdings this may include an inventory of the deer population. The DMA will form part of the Management Plan and will identify long-term management objectives and recommend specific operations needed to control the impact of deer in the woodland. Written guidance will also be available on how to interpret the DMA.

The Planner will need to take the DMA into account when preparing the Management Plan and will incorporate the key management operations recommended in the DMA into the Plan of Operations. Managing deer in accordance with the DMA is a requirement of the BWW scheme; if the woodland owner does not accept the DMA the Planner should talk to his woodland officer.

The DMA will rarely be drawn up for more than a five-year period. Even then, it is a working document and must be updated regularly to reflect the success or failure of deer management operations and changes in circumstances as they arise. FCW will assess the effectiveness of deer management by looking at tree damage. If there is felt to be excessive damage (i.e. if the actions have not been effective), the owner will be asked to update the deer management operations. If the owner does not wish to make these changes, then they will be asked to withdraw from the BWW scheme. If deer management operations are found to be effective, they will be retained upon renewal of the Plan of Operations.

The BWW Applicant, the Planner and the WDI Specialist are jointly responsible for identifying the list of actions outlined in the DMA, but it is the Applicant who has responsibility for implementing them. The WDI will be available to provide advice during the implementation phase.

BWW Grants for Deer Management

Effective management of deer will often require a combination of approaches. These may include:

- Design and management of habitat, especially woodlands
- Physical protection of vulnerable areas or individual trees
- Humane culling of deer over reasonably large areas to reduce, and then maintain, numbers at an acceptable level

BWW will provide grant aid for the infrastructure required to manage deer in line with the recommendations set out in the DMA. This could include the creation and management of deer glades, the provision of high seats and protective fencing.

The grant will be provided in the form of Woodland Improvement Grants and the grant rate will be 50% of the cost. BWW will not grant aid the costs of culling deer, marketing venison or any legal issues that arise.

Further Information

The following publications are useful guides to support best practice:

- Forestry Commission Practice Note 6 *Managing deer in the countryside* - this can be downloaded from [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/PDF/fcpn6.pdf/\\$FILE/fcpn6.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/PDF/fcpn6.pdf/$FILE/fcpn6.pdf) and FC Practice Note 18 – *How many deer?*
- The British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) *Deer stalking code of practice* which can be viewed at <http://www.basc.org.uk/content/stalkingpractice>
- The *Deer Initiative* and the *British Deer Society* produce several guidance notes and information documents related to the management of deer and handling of venison. These can be viewed at <http://www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk> and www.bds.org.uk, respectively.

The homepage of the UK Woodland Assurance Standard can be found at <http://www.ukwas.org.uk>. A full copy of the Standard can be downloaded from this site, which also carries news of ongoing revisions to the Standard.