**DEER WORK PROGRAMME ACTION PLAN, 2025/2026.**

**Progress with key projects linked to the Deer Working Group recommendations.**

**Strategic theme 1: Legislation.**

**Table 1a**

**Project: New Natural Environment (Scotland) Act.**

| **Action** | **Lead** | **Outcome** | **Associated Deer Working Group recommendation number(s).** | **Update for March 2025.** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Natural Environment Bill:** Provide policy input to articulate new deer/ natural environment bill that meets Deer Working Group recommendations and delivers mechanism to meet Scottish Biodiversity Strategy targets. | Scottish Government/ NatureScot, Forestry and Land Scotland, Scottish Forestry. | New primary legislation | 1, 3, 4-16, 19-21, 24-28, 30, 54, 57, 60-72, 78, 95, 97, 98 | Natural Environment Bill introduced to Parliament and at Committee stage. |
| **Use of Shotguns:**  Minimise extent of use of shotguns to kill deer to improve deer welfare. | Scottish Government/ NatureScot. | Only allow shotgun use as authorised by NatureScot. | 5 | Natural Environment Bill introduced to Parliament and at Committee stage. |
| **Change to seasons:** De-regulate current system; remove requirement for authorisation to shoot out-of-season, by removing /changing season for male and female deer. | Scottish Government/ NatureScot. | Changes to secondary legislation removing close season for males and changing dates of close season for female deer | 8 | Natural Environment Bill introduced to Parliament and at Committee stage. |
| **Fit and Competent Register:**  Establish a publicly available register of persons competent to shoot deer. | NatureScot. | Register of persons competent to shoot deer. | 13, 14, 15 | Natural Environment Bill introduced to Parliament and at Committee stage. |

**Strategic theme 2: Data and Research.**

**Table 2a.**

**Project: Deer counting technology and options.**

| **Action** | **Lead Agency** | **Outcome** | **Deer Working Group recommendation number.** | **Update for March 2025.** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Develop new and innovative ways of counting deer to support move away from reliance on helicopter counts in the upland red deer range. | NatureScot, Forestry and Land Scotland. | Trail new technology and reduced use of helicopters but maintain functionality e.g. accuracy and scale of count. | 87 | Trials of alternative techniques ongoing. Increased use of thermal drone imagery for woodland deer census work utilising external contract resource with NatureScot staff undertaking additional survey work.  Research project to compare counting techniques to ascertain costs, benefits and confidence limits planned. This would consider helicopter, satellite, fixed wing, drone, foot, fixed point/trail cam. photography and dung analysis work.    Wild Deer Best Practice Guide on use of drones for deer counting due for publication.  Review of NatureScot deer count policy and approach underway. |

**Table 2b.**

**Project: Deer On-line Services**

| **Action** | **Lead Agency** | **Outcome** | **Deer Working Group recommendation number.** | **Update for March 2025.** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Redevelopment of Deerline database: for issuing authorisations, assigning 'fit and competent' status and creation of an online National Cull Database that meets UK Government data standards and accessibility. | NatureScot. | Re-developed Deerline database. | 55, 58, 59 | Deer On-line Services now live. |

**Table 2c.**

**Project: Cull Plan Approval**

| **Action** | **Lead Agency** | **Outcome** | **Deer Working Group recommendation number.** | **Update for March 2025.** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Research, develop and implement a planned cull approval system for Scotland. | NatureScot. | Develop and pilot a cull approval system within the Operational Delivery Workstream priority areas. | 93, 97 | NatureScot scoping data requirements, cost-benefit analysis, assessment of feasibility and options appraisal of a planned cull approval system. Operational Delivery Workstream priority areas identified and Action Plans being drafted. |

**Table 2d.**

**Project: Linking deer densities, impacts and cull planning**

| **Action** | **Lead Agency** | **Outcome** | **Deer Working Group recommendation number.** | **Update for March 2025.** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Improve understanding of the relationships between deer densities and their impacts and how this relates to delivery of public interest outcomes and investment; summarise and assess existing research with a view to better articulating likely habitat responses to different deer densities. | NatureScot. | Shift in emphasis towards measuring impacts as opposed to a reliance on counting. Published guidance on densities and impacts - which informs Regulation and Incentives workstream. | 86, 87 | Policies and procedures relating to deer densities, impacts and cull planning reviewed. Deer data project to review data collection, Habitat Impact Assessment methodologies and count methodologies initiated. |

**Table 2e.**

**Project: Deer Vehicle Collision (DVC) Project**

| **Action** | **Lead Agency** | **Outcome** | **Deer Working Group recommendation number.** | **Update for March 2025.** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Identify priority hotspots areas for Deer Vehicle Collisions and implement actions to mitigate them. | Transport Scotland, NatureScot. | Risk-based approach to identifying priority areas. | 35-37 | Late spring Deer Aware campaign being planned.  Project looking at possible mitigation options at higher risk areas, as identified through data to 2021, completed. Report being prepared for publication. |
| Develop cloud-based portal to store and make publicly available all national Deer Vehicle Collision records. | Transport Scotland, NatureScot. | Publicly accessible DVC database | 35-37 | Cloud-based portal available via appropriate link (on request). Exploring options for making latest data available via Open Data Hub. |

**Strategic theme 3: Codes of Practice and Best Practice.**

**Table 3a.**

**Project: Wild Deer Best Practice.**

| **Action** | **Lead Agency** | **Outcome** | **Deer Working Group recommendation number.** | **Update for March 2025.** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Revise Wild Deer Best Practice content to incorporate changes resulting from Deer working Group recommendations, and delivery of wider Deer Work Programme through Strategic Deer Board and Workstreams. | NatureScot. | NatureScot has committed to supporting the Wild Deer Best Practice Project for five years and guidance and training events meet new requirements and demands in line with Deer working Group recommendations and new deer legislation. | 11, 29, 30, 47-50, 80 | Review of Best Practice guides underway. Potential new guides being identified. Re-launch due in 2025.  Statutory guidance reviewed and due for launch in Q1.  Practioner events held throughout 2024/2025 and events arranged and being organised for venues across Scotland in 2025/2026.  New Website to be launched in Q1. |

**Table 3b.**

**Project: Deer Code.**

| **Action** | **Lead Agency** | **Outcome** | **Deer Working Group recommendation number.** | **Update for March 2025.** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Revise Deer Code and other deer related guidance. Dependent on update to Wild Deer Best Practice guides following new legislation. | NatureScot. | Revised Deer Code and other guidance. | 79 | NatureScot will engage with stakeholders to revise Code of Practice once new legislation in place. |

**Strategic theme 4: Policy.**

**Table 4a.**

**Project: Policy Development & Implementation**

| **Action** | **Lead Agency** | **Outcome** | **Deer Working Group recommendation number.** | **Update for March 2025.** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Strategic Deer Board maintain oversight of development & delivery of Deer Work Programme and Action Plan through Scottish Biodiversity Strategy 2030 – 2045. | Scottish Government, NatureScot, Forestry and Land Scotland, Scottish Forestry, National Parks. | Deer Work Programme agreed. Delivery of Scottish Biodiversity Strategy outcomes 2030 & 2045. | 17, 40, 41, 53, 75, 77, 81, 82, 84, 88-90, 99 | Board established and delivering a programme of work. The number and remit of the workstreams being revised.  Deer Action Plan drafted and being updated quarterly. |

**Table 4b.**

**Project: Operational Delivery Workstream Priority Areas**

| **Action** | **Lead Agency** | **Outcome** | **Deer Working Group recommendation number.** | **Update for March 2025.** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Regulation, Incentives & Operational Delivery workstreams to develop and implement a programme of work to direct delivery on the ground in priority locations and more effective use of NatureScot regulatory powers. | Scottish Government, NatureScot, Forestry and Land Scotland, Scottish Forestry, National Parks. | Rationale and Programme of work agreed and priority locations for action on-the-ground agreed. | 31, 33, 34, 36, 37, 51, 52, 76, 85, 96 | Operational Delivery Workstream has developed criteria and maps to prioritise operational activity on the ground. Action Plans for delivery drafted. |

**Table 4c.**

**Project: Lowland Deer**

| **Action** | **Lead Agency** | **Outcome** | **Deer Working Group recommendation number.** | **Update for March 2025.** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Support Lowland Deer Network Scotland, develop an incentive scheme and continue to work with Local Authorities on landscape approaches, particularly green space and woodland creation, through continued funding and support for Deer Statements at Local Authority scale (ongoing). | Scottish Forestry, Forestry and Land Scotland, NatureScot. | Action Plans for priority areas will include lowland deer. | 51, 52, 91 | Operational Delivery Workstream has identified the Clyde Climate Forest as a priority area to focus on challenges around lowland deer management.  NatureScot is continuing to work with Local Authorities on landscape approaches through continued funding and support for Deer Statements (ongoing).  NatureScot, Forestry and Land Scotland, Transport Scotland and Scottish Forestry are increasing investment in Lowland Deer Network Scotland to support lowland deer management.  Deer Management Incentive Scheme pilot (focussing on roe deer in the Central Belt) being reviewed for renewal in 2025/2026. |

**Table 4d.**

**Project: INNS**

| **Action** | **Lead Agency** | **Outcome** | **Deer Working Group recommendation number.** | **Update for March 2025.** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Control spread of non-native species. | NatureScot. | Action plan for regional delivery (taking a risk-based approach) has been produced. | 38, 39, 42-46 | Project scope to be defined; cross-reference with Scottish Plan for Invasive Non-Native Species surveillance, prevention and control to be completed.  New sika policy drafted.  Incentive scheme for sika management under review and due for renewal in 2025/2026. |

**Strategic theme 5: Significant increase in the number of deer harvested per annum.**

**Table 5a.**

**Project: Capacity Building**

| **Action** | **Lead Agency** | **Outcome** | **Deer Working Group recommendation number.** | **Update for March 2025.** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Work with the deer sector & colleges to identify future skills needs and build capacity and resilience. | NatureScot. | Capacity and assessment of future need scoped. | 80, 99 | Scoping report published. Further work being developed with the sector to look at barriers and constraints to future requirements. NatureScot to join new Game & Wildlife Sector Skills Group being convened by Scottish Land and Estates and administered by Lantra.  Best Practice - all guides being reviewed and updated, and new guides being developed. Website being re-developed and due for launch in Q1. Best Practice events being held and further events planned. |

**Table 5b.**

**Project: Infrastructure**

| **Action** | **Lead Agency** | **Outcome** | **Deer Working Group recommendation number.** | **Update for March 2025.** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Work with the deer sector to align larder infrastructure and capacity with future need. | Forestry and Land Scotland, NatureScot. | Capacity and assessment of future need scoped. | 99 | Partnership project with SAOS to work with stakeholders, including Lowland Deer Network Scotland and Scottish Venison, exploring community larder and processing infrastructure at various scales underway. |

**Table 5c.**

**Project: Incentives**

| **Action** | **Lead Agency** | **Outcome** | **Deer Working Group recommendation number.** | **Update for March 2025.** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Develop incentive pilot schemes for culling focussing on a 'lowland' area for roe deer, a more northerly area for sika and the Cairngorms National Park Authority for red deer. | NatureScot, Cairngorms National Park Authority. | Increased culling of roe deer, red deer and sika in the respective target areas. | N/A | Deer Management Incentive Scheme pilots for 2024/2025 under review with intention to re-launch for 2025/2026.  Cairngorms National Park Authority focussed on red deer; South Loch Ness focussed on sika; Central Belt focused on roe. |

**Table 5d.**

**Project: Venison**

| **Action** | **Lead Agency** | **Outcome** | **Deer Working Group recommendation number.** | **Update for March 2025.** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Support the venison sector to build greater capacity and resilience to meet projected future demand from increased culls (including the testing of incentives). | Scottish Government - Scottish Food & Drink, NatureScot, Food Standards Scotland, Forestry and Land Scotland. | Scope and review of capacity to meet future need. | 19-21, 23 | Working closely with Scottish Venison, Scottish Government and other relevant parties to encourage and develop greater collaboration regarding use of deer larders.  Strategic Deer Board promoting community stalking on public land. Community stalking established at Creag Meagaidh National Nature reserve (NNR) and at Beinn Eighe NNR. |

**Table 5e.**

**Project: Population baseline and trends and modelling including mapping scale, scope**

**and extent of cull**

| **Action** | **Lead Agency** | **Outcome** | **Deer Working Group recommendation number.** | **Update for March 2025.** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| a) Develop a better understanding of populations and densities across all four deer species at a regional level for all of Scotland.  i) Analysis of upland Deer Management Group red deer populations to identify the number of deer (10 deer per sq. km maximum).  ii) Develop and promote sika policy.  iii) Improve understanding of woodland deer densities. | NatureScot, Forestry and Land Scotland. | Verified population model for all species across all of Scotland and map the scale of harvest required to meet Scottish Biodiversity Strategy 2030 & 2045 targets. | 2, 42 - 44, 87 | Population trends and modelling completed and rolled out. Will lead to better understanding of populations, densities and distributions.  i) Information from latest red deer counts being collated.  ii) Sika policy completed and ready for publishing.  iii) Scoping camera trapping project. |
| b) Gather more accurate information on number of deer harvested. | NatureScot. | More accurate figures for number of deer across all species shot. | 55-59,  93, 96 | Deer App. tested in the pilot incentive schemes.  Deer Online Services now available for on-line cull returns. |
| c) Work with RPID to increase coverage of cull returns. | NatureScot, Scottish Government. | Increased geographical coverage off cull returns. | 58 | Deer App. being tested in pilot incentive schemes.  Liaising with Scottish Government re. access to landholder information. |