

ENGLAND &
WALES **BEST
PRACTICE
GUIDES**

Management plans.

Deer Management





Introduction

The aim of this guide is to describe the use of a deer management plan as an aid to achieving deer management objectives from local to landscape level.

This guide links to the Cull Planning and Population Dynamics guides.

Who should be involved?

- Contributions are required both from the landowner (or representatives) and the deer managers who will deliver the actions identified.
- Others that should be consulted and who may be able to contribute to the plan objectives include land users such as farmers, foresters, gamekeepers, and wardens.
- Any relevant grant authorities might require a plan and may wish to contribute to it.
- In many cases it is also worth consulting neighbours with the aim of agreeing common objectives and then working together to achieve these.



Why have a deer management plan?

- A deer management plan (DMP) is the theoretical plan that a deer manager will operate under. It will identify any and all objectives for the land 'in question such as timber production, agriculture, conservation sites and commercial stalking etc. and set the targets and techniques a deer manager will use to manage deer whilst factoring in these objectives.
- A DMP should make clear how deer need to be managed to achieve land management objectives while at the same time ensuring deer welfare.
- A central principle of most DMPs is that good deer management should aim to maintain healthy deer populations in balance with their environment.
- The process of developing the plan is in itself of value; it will encourage dialogue between a variety of stakeholders and highlight the range of expectations that they all have. It should therefore enable better collaboration and further understanding of the management challenges faced by us as deer managers.
- For the far-ranging species of deer it will also be important to consider the objectives of neighbouring land holdings and aim to collaborate in the management of deer at a scale appropriate to their home ranges.

Setting the boundaries

The size of the area and the number of landholdings to be included will vary depending on the objectives of the plan. The differing scales of plans may be categorised as:

- Landscape scale DMP for very large areas (e.g. a SSSI woodland cluster or National Park) that applies similar objectives across multiple land holdings
- A Deer Management Group (DMG) plan
- Individual land ownership DMP
- A DMP that outlines a single approach for a single land use e.g. in connection with a forestry scheme.



What should be in a DMP?

- Only use information that is relevant and useful, just remember that some DMPs are intended for other readers.
- If it is helpful the plan may be split between those areas which are essentially background information and the parts of the plan which are active and constantly reviewed, such as the cull plan.
- If the DMP includes a cull plan that is based on population numbers it is useful to present a simple population model that starts with an estimate of current numbers and applies annual estimates of culls and recruitment, to show how numbers will be modified to achieve objectives. See the Cull Planning guide for more information.
- It is essential to link the population model to habitat objectives to ensure sustainable management.

The diagram below outlines the planning process and may be used as an outline proforma; a more detailed proforma is available. Use only those headings that are useful, focussing on objectives and how they can be met.



Objectives

It is important that management is carried out to meet objectives which should be:

- **Specific** – Objectives should be clear and understood by all concerned. Objectives may be simple (e.g. prevent habitat damage) or more involved (e.g. at the same time; minimising habitat and crop damage, achieving satisfactory herd numbers/health, improving quality, optimising income from culled deer)
- **Measurable** – Objectives need to be capable of being monitored annually so that progress can be tracked. Progress towards meeting objectives must be measured in a way that relates specifically to that objective, for instance: if reducing habitat impact is the objective, then simply monitoring whether cull targets have been met is not a useful way to judge success, it is impact levels that must be monitored, culling is just a means to an end.
- **Agreed** – Stakeholders e.g. landowner, stalker, forester, gamekeeper, grant and statutory authorities (where applicable) should agree what the objectives are and how they will be achieved.
- **Realistic** – Within the constraints of resources, knowledge and time. Common limitations include seasons, manpower, equipment and time. There may also be opportunities for improvements; objectives should be set with these in mind and remain flexible enough to allow them.
- **Time based** – Objectives must be set over a realistic time period. It is often difficult to predict how long it will take to reach an objective, for instance reducing populations from very high levels can take a long time and involve a sustained effort to accomplish. In the case of multiple objectives some will be reached before others.

Training

- The concept and practice of writing and carrying out DMP's can be confusing at first. However, there are resources available to provide training on the matter.
- All of the key organisations will be able to provide advice and/or training on deer management matters, including the writing of DMP's. These organisations include BASC, BDS, NGO and Forestry Commission.



Further Information

- **DMQ**
<https://www.dmq.org.uk/>
- **BASC**
<https://basc.org.uk/>
- **BDS**
<https://bds.org.uk/>
- **NGO**
<https://www.nationalgamekeepers.org.uk/>
- **Forestry Commission**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/forestry-commission/>