

Developing a New Vision for Deer Management: 'From species management to ecosystem approach'

Policy implications of current thinking

Context

In March 2011, a group of key stakeholders (Box 1) involved with deer management in Scotland participated in a series of workshops on the future governance of deer and natural resources, run by the EU-funded 'HUNTING for Sustainability' project, and utilised a technique called Scenario Analysis (Box 2)¹. This research was prompted by recent and ongoing policy and institutional reform including the merger of the Deer Commission for Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage, the passage of the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 (WANE)², the continuing importance of 'Wild Deer: a National Approach'³ and Best Practice Guidance, as well as likely implications of the Land Use Strategy⁴ and forthcoming CAP reforms. These policy changes reflect an increasing diversity of both public and private land management objectives. However opinions are divided on the necessity for legislative change to ensure competing objectives are balanced effectively.

Here we present the outcomes of the scenario process, discuss the uncertainties and suggest principles and strategies that should be considered when policy is developed. Emerging recommendations highlight a shift from a 'single-species' approach to a **greater awareness of and stakeholder demand for an ecosystem scale approach** (Box 3 overleaf) in policy direction for the future.

Key messages:

- Deer management must be considered in the context of wider species and ecosystem scale objectives, alongside socio-economic implications.
- Policy development needs to promote collaboration between public and private interests and develop a balance that recognises effective voluntary approaches yet identifies where a regulatory approach is appropriate.
- Managing natural resources (including deer) on a more holistic, ecosystem scale, needs to be based on research recommendations.

This document represents a summary of current thinking from a range of organisations with contrasting interests in deer and land management – including private, public and environmental bodies. This shared vision is a key outcome of their participation in this novel research process.

BOX 1 Participating stakeholder organisations

British Association for Shooting and Conservation
Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group
Scottish Natural Heritage
Uplands Co-ordination Group
Scottish Countryside Alliance
Association of Deer Management Groups
Scottish Land & Estates
Forest Enterprise Scotland
British Deer Society
John Muir Trust
Cairngorms National Park Authority
Scottish Wildlife Trust
Scottish Gamekeepers Association

BOX 2

The Scenario Analysis method

The production of scenarios provides a systematic opportunity to explore key features of alternative futures, identify the winners and losers of each potential future, and highlight the implications of action, a shift from the status quo, and policy reform. **Thus, scenario analysis is not about the likelihood of what will happen in the future, but instead provides the opportunity to evaluate a range of different possible futures.**

The scenario method is a novel approach in the context of Scottish land management, and on-the-ground relevance is fostered through the participation of key organisations such as those listed in Box 1.

The key stages of the Scenario Analysis method are as follows:



Stage (i): Evaluating the current issues

The main stakeholder responses to the Stage 3 debate and passage of the WANE Act, as well as other key points on current policy and reform included the following:

- The WANE Act is unlikely to cause any ‘significant’ changes to the practicalities and governance of deer management in Scotland.
- In general there is a preference by the private sector for a voluntary approach, whilst environmental NGOs and agencies called for a more statutory approach. Achieving a balance between these approaches for the practical implementation of the ‘Code of Practice’ for deer management requires substantial further thinking.
- Issues surrounding a lack of definition of ‘sustainable deer management’ and the need to recognise that this goal should refer to a process rather than an outcome.
- A need to consider all deer species within the wider ‘wildlife context’, broadening out the current single-species focus.
- Raising awareness of the necessity of managing natural resources such as deer, and to take into account the variation across the country in relation to deer numbers and their impacts.
- The importance of economic and social sustainability and impact assessment, as well as public awareness-raising of the direct and indirect benefits of game management to the rural economy.

BOX 3:

The ecosystem approach

“A strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way, and which recognises that people with their cultural and varied social needs are an integral part of ecosystems”

(Scottish Government, 2011⁴)



Stage (ii) Identifying the key factors and uncertainties

The first workshop focussed on identifying the key factors and uncertainties relevant to implementing ‘sustainable deer management’, the goal of the Code of Practice. These key factors include:

- A broader landscape context as the basis of policy production, recognising that deer are only one component.
- The need to progress towards a more holistic, ecosystem view and away from the current ‘piecemeal approach’ based on species management.
- The need for a rigorous evidence base is fundamental, and research and monitoring are required to underpin a holistic approach.
- A perceived lack of objective and quantifiable data required for a decision support tool to assist the management of natural resources.
- A need to demonstrate to the public the evidence base for management actions and how these support public interests, such as welfare standards across species.
- Issues regarding politics and perceptions of land management are contested, being perceived by some in the private sector as ‘anti-private’, and by others as favouring private interests.
- That there is a balance to be struck between a voluntary and regulatory framework, and consequently a need for greater collaboration and communication.
- Simultaneously there is a challenge in balancing different interests, motivations, and priorities, as well as the need to be adaptive.



Stage (iii) explored and evaluated governance options and scenarios

for the future of deer and wider species management in Scotland.

Scenarios were co-constructed by stakeholders and researchers, and formed the basis for discussing and identifying the policy strategies and opportunities summarised in Stage (iv) below (see Box 4 overleaf). The scenarios are not reproduced here to avoid focussing on the one subset of all possible futures that were discussed.

Stage (iv) Highlighting policy relevance and future strategies

The governance options and scenarios were explored, based on an analysis of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (see SWOT analysis in Box 4 overleaf).

In summary, the agreed principles and strategies that should guide future policy development include:

- Policy reform to deliver public interests should build on good will and collaboration to maintain the value of natural resources.
- Decision-making should be informed by a national set of broad objectives and criteria.
- Increased research and science should provide evidence from an objective view, funded by the Scottish Government and other interests, in conjunction with dynamic deer management plans, whilst not overburdening those employed in other game management tasks.
- All species of deer should be considered including peri-/urban deer. Their status as 'wild' deer, in an ecosystem context should be retained and policy should continue to prioritise welfare issues.
- Deer management groups (DMGs) should recognise that they have a role in wider resource management, but need to collaborate with public and third sector interests to incorporate a more holistic approach.
- The economic consequences of policy reform should be considered, as should the transaction costs of implementing policy by land managers.
- Conflict resolution processes should be established.
- Policy should be implemented, where appropriate, through decision making at the local level.
- The important role of public education, greater understanding, awareness, involvement and engagement should be recognised, as well as education for decision-makers in authority, e.g. local authorities, and increasing public access to/involvement in deer stalking.
- Deer should be considered a valued resource and venison promoted, with the potential for deer farm growth.
- The goal of 'sustainability' should be re-framed, identifying a new vision for the future of Scotland's natural resources, and shifting from 'single-species' to an ecosystem scale focus.



Participant reflections and next steps

There is great potential to learn from other 'successful' species/habitat management frameworks, for example district fishery boards. Participants reflect that fishery boards have been able to adapt to 'changing times', as well as becoming effective facilitators of collaborative success. It is proposed that DMGs match the level of accountability illustrated by the fishery boards.

Lessons may also be learned internationally from developments in integrated management of natural resources being implemented in countries such as Sweden.

The *next step* in this transdisciplinary research project will be to identify the options or actions required to satisfy the principles and achieve the strategies outlined above when developing future policy. This will require land management stakeholder involvement in the co-construction of the research agenda with researchers and policy makers, to develop understanding of the practicalities of the 'ecosystem approach'.

Box 4: SWOT analysis

The scenarios created during the workshop were analysed in relation to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of different options to be explored, thus identifying key features that future policy development should consider.

'Strengths' that should be a feature of future policy include:

- the potential for **accountable, local decision-making on deer and wider species management, and where appropriate retaining national level regulation for issues such as welfare;**
- the development of **an evidence base connecting 'grass-roots' knowledge with research;** and
- establishing **conflict resolution processes,** with the protection and status of managed species based on a shared knowledge base and hard evidence.

'Weaknesses' that should be avoided when considering future policy include:

- exacerbating the divide between rural and urban** (and public-private interests) through excessive regulation at the local, regional and national level;
- concerns of **'over-prescription' and a lack of flexibility;**
- over-complexity for land managers** in implementing an ecosystem centred approach; and
- undermining private enterprise and investment** through excessive regulation.

'Opportunities' that future policy should promote include:

- greater economic diversification;**
- wider consensus with regard to **the remit for public and private funding** (e.g. for research);
- increased communication between land management interests** (implicit collaboration);
- public education;** and
- 'self-regulation'** – continuing a voluntary framework, where this is able to demonstrate the delivery of public and private interests. This will still require a regulatory backstop should the voluntary approach fail.

'Threats' that can affect policy development concerned issues of:

- the viability and carrying capacity of the uplands;**
- the **risk to 'wild deer' stalking** from increasing management aimed at alternative land uses, e.g. woodland expansion, renewable energy, amongst others;
- an **over-burdening of the private sector threatening private investment** in land management.
- an **over-bureaucratic approach** with little perceived opportunity to change policy on the EU scale; and
- a **lack of clarity regarding 'who' should be providing public education,** and with what motivations.

Links and further reading

¹ De Brabandere, L. and Iny, A. (2010)

'Scenarios and Creativity: Thinking in new boxes',
Technological Forecasting and Social Change 77 (1506–1512).

² Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2011/6/contents/enacted>

³ Scotland's Wild Deer – A National Approach, The Scottish Government (2008): <http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/C249895.pdf>

⁴ 'Getting the best from our land' – A Land Use Strategy for Scotland, The Scottish Government (2011):

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/345946/0115155.pdf>

Acknowledgements

This project was conducted by the James Hutton Institute and funded by the EU funded FP7 HUNT project (212160) with support from the Scottish Government's Environmental Change programme. We are grateful to the organisations involved in HUNT's National Consultative Group who participated in the workshops and co-constructed this document. Thanks also to G. Maffey, University of Aberdeen.



The James
Hutton
Institute

Justin Irvine
The James Hutton Institute
Craigiebuckler
Aberdeen AB15 8QH
Scotland UK

Tel: +44 (0) 844 928 5428 (switchboard)
Fax: +44 (0) 844 928 5429

www.hutton.ac.uk

June 2011

