

To the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
The Rt Honorable George Eustice, MP

10th September 2020

The English Tree Strategy Consultation

Dear Sir,

Although only one question in the formal consultation document concerns deer and their management, The Government's ambitious plans for expanding woodland cover in England and especially the area devoted to hardwoods inevitably have various implications in relation to impacts from deer and impacts for deer both in the immediate, short-term and in the longer term.

The British Deer Society exists to promote understanding of the biology of deer in the British Isles with particular reference to their impacts on the natural habitat, forestry, agriculture and areas to which the public have access, to develop and promote understanding of effective and humane methods of management both of deer populations and their impacts. In considering the English Tree Strategy presented for consultation, the Board of Trustees of the British Deer Society would like to offer the following general comments.

Government's commitment to plant 11 million trees by 2022 (equating to an area of about 1,273 hectares) with a longer term aim of increasing the area of woodland in England to 12% of land by 2060 will have an enormous impact on deer populations and future management needs, in both the short- and the longer term. In the shorter term, in order to protect these developing woodlands, there will be a need to reduce deer numbers (or at least browsing pressure) in new plantations over a considerable period of years until they are properly established. This will either imply a sustained reduction in deer densities over a prolonged period or alternatively a need for extensive fencing of newly-stocked areas, with the effect of displacing resident deer and thus potentially increasing densities and impacts in other adjacent areas. Neither strategy is without its difficulties. Even where culling is effective in reducing local densities, there are inevitably source-sink movements at the landscape scale with a strong tendency for continuing infill of those areas of lower density^{1,2}); recent studies have shown that for culling to be effective in reducing vegetational impacts, it needs to be coordinated over large areas and efforts sustained over a considerable period^{3,4}

All six species of deer resident in the UK are by preference woodland creatures. In the longer term, therefore, when all these new woodlands are opened once again to deer access, we will have created thousands of hectares of suitable habitat, which may well, in turn, increase productivity and will certainly accommodate increasing numbers of deer across the landscape, increasing the future need for management. This has two obvious implications.

Within many countries of Europe – and the UK is no exception in this regard- much of the management of deer numbers and impacts through culling is undertaken by those who are in effect volunteers, or recreational stalkers; yet any management model based largely on volunteers in this way is inevitably fragile. Due to increased urbanisation of populations and changing attitudes to hunting, the number of deer stalkers overall is in decline through much of Europe and in many other countries worldwide,. Alongside this trend there is in addition a marked increase in age of those who do hunt. If fewer young people are training as hunters so that overall numbers of hunters are declining and, simultaneously, average age is increasing, then in practice management capacity is getting smaller and smaller. With expanding populations of deer, an increasingly older human demographic and increasing urbanisation of human populations, there is projected to be a growing mismatch before too long between management need and management capacity in those places where control of deer populations, as in England, depends on the efforts of recreational stalkers.

There is an additional complication. This increased need for present and future management is occurring within a wider context where there is a growing resistance among the general public for lethal control of deer and this in turn may have implications with achieving effective management of wildlife populations. While, of course, there are other tools available in the deer manager's toolkit for reducing impacts from a given population of deer, not all of these are necessarily appropriate or practical in every situation– especially in development of hardwood forests – and control of numbers will always play a role in management. It is imperative that we educate that wider public to accept that such lethal control remains the most realistic and effective method available to us of managing deer numbers and their impacts (as well as producing an excellent, healthy and palatable food resource).

We hope these comments are helpful in considering the results of the wider consultation launched. We at the British Deer Society would be happy to offer further details or clarification if we can be of further assistance or engage in further discussion by Zoom or other conferencing platform if this would be constructive.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'Rory Putman'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter 'y'.

Professor Rory Putman, Chairman

Literature cited:

1. Wäber, K., Spencer, J., Dolman, P.M. (2013). Achieving landscape-scale deer management for biodiversity conservation: the need to consider sources and sinks. *The Journal of Wildlife Management* 77, 726-736.
2. Putman, R.J. (2012). Effects of heavy localised culling on population distribution of red deer at a landscape scale: an analytical modelling approach. *European Journal of Wildlife Research* 58, 781-796.
3. Apollonio, M., Andersen, R. and Putman R. (2010) Present status and future challenges for European ungulate management. In: M. Apollonio, R. Andersen and R. Putman (eds.) **European Ungulates and their Management in the 21st century**. Cambridge University Press, 578-604.
4. Fattorini, N, Watson, P., Lovari, S. and Putman R. (2020) The scale-dependent effectiveness of wildlife management: a case study on British deer. *Journal of Environmental Management* in press.