

## **Response to the DEFRA consultation on the proposed Deer Management Strategy (published 4 August 2022).**

The Royal Forestry Society (RFS) is the largest education charity dedicated to promoting the wise management of trees and woods across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Across this area, RFS members are collectively responsible for the stewardship of the vast majority of managed woodland.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the proposed Deer Management Strategy.

### **Key points**

1. Effective, landscape-scale coordination of deer management is required to address the substantial threat to young trees and woodlands, caused by deer. Coordination of deer management needs to involve all key stakeholders, including woodland owners and managers, farmers, and other significant landowners.
2. The Deer Management Strategy should work in tandem with policies relating to the management and regulation of other vertebrate species (e.g., grey squirrels, wild boar, and beavers) which can adversely affect the management of trees and woodland.
3. The strategy should reflect and take greater account of how the different deer species impact young trees and woodlands.
4. The monitoring of deer numbers and their impact, to inform management plans for deer control, should be facilitated to enable more stakeholders to engage.
5. The Deer Management Strategy should be consistent with and supportive of other policies and initiatives designed to underpin the establishment and management of woodlands within England and where possible, be complementary to related policies in bordering devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales.

### **1. Coordination and involvement of stakeholders**

Effective, landscape-scale coordination of deer management is required to address the substantial threat to young trees and woodlands, caused by deer. All deer species are highly mobile through a range of habitats and are extremely hard to contain within or exclude from any given area. Effective coordination and involvement of a range of landowners is needed for control to be effective over time. Whilst the RFS is focused on the known significant impacts of deer upon young trees and woodland, we recognize that deer affect other land interested, including damage to farmland crops. We believe that those involved with the management of deer need to be involved to enable effective implementation of the strategy. The Deer Management Strategy would be improved if the issue of coordination and involvement of key stakeholders were more fully described.

## **2. Other vertebrate control and regulations**

There are other vertebrate species which can adversely affect the establishment or management of woodlands, including, but not exclusive to, grey squirrel, rabbits, wild boar, and beaver. As described above, addressing the impacts of deer requires the buy-in of substantial proportion of the land management community. This buy-in may be threatened if these other mammals are not deemed to be adequately controlled, which may then undermine attempts to address deer populations and their impacts. We recognize the potential benefits to some wildlife habitats, for their wildlife value, from the introduction of boar and beaver, but appropriate regulation is required to ensure these mammals do not become a greater threat to the management of woodland, e.g., for productive timber or other management objectives. The Deer Management Strategy would be improved with detail of how deer control will work in tandem with other vertebrate control policies.

## **3. Deer ecology and minimising spread of non-native deer**

Each of the 6 resident deer species found wild within England have different physiology, occupy different ecological niches and have different impacts upon young trees and woodland. There is some recognition of this point within the strategy, but it would be improved with more detail of how the different deer species are intended to be controlled.

Funding and other incentives are required to encourage woodland owners and others to help with deer control, including minimizing the spread of non-native deer species. Coordination of effort at sufficient, often landscape -scale, is needed. This could be achieved through the creation and support of landowner clusters but will require long-term commitment to be effective.

## **4. Evidence base**

Establishing a better understanding of deer populations and their impact can only help with the implementation of the deer control strategy. The National Deer Data Dashboard sounds like a good initiative, but it must be easy to use and available to a range of stakeholders, to be effective.

## **5. Consistency with other policies and administrations**

There are number of related policies and plans and more being revised or drafted, many in the wake of the England Trees Action Plan (ETAP). It is important that these papers, many designed to underpin and support the establishment and management of woodlands within England, are aligned with the Deer Management Strategy. It would obviously be a benefit if any such Strategy for England is complementary to related policies in the bordering devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales.