

Appendix 8.6 - Deer Report

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Introduction

The Proposed Development site has a resident population of sika deer (*Cervus nippon*) in low numbers and low numbers of seasonal red deer (*C. elaphus*) pass through, occasional roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) may be present. Paul Adkins is the woodland deer manager for this property who has expertise in deer management as a full-time professional and has input into this deer report. He is a self-employed contract stalker for Forestry and Land Scotland and also guides professionally while assessing Deer Management Qualifications and Lantra Deer & Wildlife course specifications. Paul Adkins spends regular time at the site and is typically there stalking and looking over the area monthly. The Proposed Development site has several high seats and two shooting towers to aid in the culling of deer. The site has approximately 21 – 28 days of stalking annually, with a high proportion of this stalking taking place during September to November.

This deer report has been completed following best practice guidance from NatureScot (NS) (NS, 2020b).

Cull Records

Cull records for the Proposed Development site have been maintained and submitted to NS since 2011 and are filed annually. The last six years of records are shown below for reference:

Table 1 – Annual Cull Records

Year	Red Deer			Sika Deer			Roe Deer			Total Cull Number
	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Stags	Hinds	Calves	
2014/15	2	1	1	3	3	1	0	0	0	11
2015/16	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	5
2016/17	0	1	0	2	2	1	0	0	0	6
2017/18	2	1	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	7
2018/19	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	4
2019/20	4	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	8
2020/21*	2	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	5

*Culls as of 01 November 2020.

Deer Management

There is not a specific cull target set for the Proposed Development site as the red and sika deer in season are generally culled where an opportunity presents itself. Roe deer are in low numbers locally and are not culled at this time if seen at the site. The forestry bordering the entire site is managed by Forestry and Land Scotland and deer management there is conducted by engaged contract stalkers. This has put sustained pressure on the local deer populations and vacuum culling has become an issue where resident sika deer from the Proposed Development site that inevitably move out onto neighbouring land from time to time are likely to be culled. Due to this and with the intended culling on site, the resident sika deer population will remain in low numbers for the foreseeable future. However, should the vegetation monitoring of restored peatland and planted woodland on the site highlight that deer are having an adverse effect on habitats through trampling or grazing, active deer control will be undertaken. The requirements for vegetation monitoring are discussed in Appendix 8.7. This deer control will comprise active culling of deer on the site and/or fencing of the affected habitats to exclude deer.

Culling will follow a careful and considered approach in order to avoid damage to infrastructure on the small site, though this is considered to be unlikely given the barrier of woodland that would remain.

Wildlife motion sensitive trail cameras have been in use since 2012 to monitor and assess deer and other wildlife movements across the site. Currently, there are four wildlife cameras in operation at the Proposed Development site (a fifth went missing in October 2016). These cameras are checked monthly and rotated around several points across the woodland within the site. Roe deer have not been sighted at the site or caught on camera since March 2016. The information from these cameras has shown that there is approximately seven to nine sika deer in total on-site as a resident population producing two to three calves per year. It is the opinion of the deer manager that the current strategy for deer management and monitoring of deer numbers is effective for this woodland area within the site.

Conclusion

Construction of the Proposed Development is expected to start in 2022 and the Proposed Development is planned to become operational in 2023. Construction of the Proposed Development may lead to the localised, short-term and temporary displacement of deer into the surrounding area, which would cease following the completion of construction, with deer likely to move back into the displaced areas during operation. Deer are also likely to return to the site when the workforce retires for the day. Culling of displaced deer during construction is likely to be undertaken by contract stalkers for Forestry and Land Scotland since the deer will have moved out of the site.

Management and maintenance of the operational Proposed Development in the medium-term is not considered to lead to significant deer displacement as personnel activity would be low, with controlled vehicle speed limits. Deer quickly adapt to activities that pose no threat and are likely to remain in the site during operation. As a result, the culling detailed in this report will continue throughout the operational period, in consultation with site personnel.

In the longer-term, decommissioning of the Proposed Development, through dismantling and removal of turbines and other infrastructure and habitat reinstatement, is likely to lead to a similar displacement effect as that experienced during construction activities.

The monitoring of deer movement and counts will continue to be undertaken by the deer manager as part of their overall duties and the information provided will be used to manage cull levels in conjunction with the vegetation monitoring of restored peatland and planted woodland habitats discussed in Appendix 8.7. Engagement with neighbours on the surrounding estates and the North West Sutherland Deer Management Group will also occur, where possible, to ensure deer management measures are complementary and collaborative.

References

NS (2020). *Managing Deer*. Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/land-and-sea-management/managing-wildlife/managing-deer>. Accessed on: 29 September 2020.