



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

# Consultation on the proposed deer management strategy

Published: 4 August 2022

We are the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We're responsible for improving and protecting the environment, growing the green economy, sustaining thriving rural communities and supporting our world-class food, farming and fishing industries.

We work closely with our 33 agencies and arm's length bodies on our ambition to make our air purer, our water cleaner, our land greener and our food more sustainable. Our mission is to restore and enhance the environment for the next generation, and to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.



© Crown copyright 2022

This information is licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/)

This publication is available at [www.gov.uk/government/publications](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications)

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at

Consultation Coordinator, Defra

2nd Floor, Foss House, Kings Pool,

1-2 Peasholme Green, York, YO1 7PX

[www.gov.uk/defra](http://www.gov.uk/defra)

## Contents

1. Introduction .....	4
2. Proposals .....	4
3. Consultation questions.....	8
4. How to respond.....	13
5. Confidentially and data protections .....	14
6. What happens next? .....	14

# 1. Introduction

We need to do more to sustainably manage deer. The UK deer population is estimated to have increased from 450,000 in the 1970s to two million today. They are now at the highest level for 1000 years.

This brings many risks and issues. It causes a substantial threat to young trees and woodlands, and therefore the government tree planting ambitions. It reduces the final timber crop value by 30-50% through browsing damage. It can cause significant crop and agricultural damage, with some individual landowners having lost over £1 million per year due to deer damage. It can also be harmful to deer themselves, with overpopulation causing malnourishment and allowing diseases to spread more easily.

We are therefore developing a deer management strategy, as we committed to do in the England Tree Action Plan. The strategy aims to ensure that new and existing woodlands are resilient, sustainable and that wild deer populations do not cause unacceptable levels of impact to them. As part of this work, we are reviewing the evidence base, current barriers to effective management, relevant legislation, regulation and incentives as well as developing sector capacity, skills and markets. While seeking to increase the effectiveness of management, we will maintain high standards of animal welfare, humaneness, and public safety.

The design of proposals for the strategy have been guided by the broad consensus across all stakeholder audiences from the England Tree Strategy Consultation in 2020, that the deer population is a major challenge to protecting and improving our trees and woodland. All agreed that long-term sustainable solutions are required to ensure that an action plan for trees, woodland and forestry is successful in its aims.

Following on from the strong consensus opinion that a strategy is needed, the purpose of this consultation is to gather views on key proposals being considered for the deer strategy. These views will help shape the final actions that are included in the strategy. The consultation will be open from 04 August to 02 September.

## 2. Proposals

### 2.1 Sustainable management

Our aim is to ensure a well-managed and healthy wild deer population in England, which mitigates the threat to long-term environmental, social, or economic sustainability. A deer population that is in balance with its ecosystem will allow woodland to flourish, with all the healthy understory vegetation needed to support iconic woodland species. This will also reduce the damage that deer can cause to agricultural crops and timber.

The Government recognises that when deer belong to no one, they can expand to unsustainable levels. We are proposing more targeted incentives to increase landowner focus on reducing impacts where deer are preventing the establishment and regeneration

of new and existing woodland. These incentives will compliment traditional voluntary deer management and management via sporting leases.

## **2.2 Improving the laws and regulations on deer**

Alongside action to reduce the impacts of deer, we also need to take action to curb deer population increases in a sustainable and humane way. Lethal control is currently the most effective and humane means when other protection methods are inadequate.

The Deer Act was reviewed in 2007 to remove some of the previous barriers to effective control. It is now recognised that there is a need to further refine legislation to reduce deer impacts while continuing to protect deer welfare. We are considering changes which can modernise and update the law for deer management.

The Deer Act includes close seasons for culling of male and female deer. We are proposing to review and amend this to allow land managers striving to reduce damage to cull male deer at any time during the year should they choose to do so. Close seasons were developed to protect male deer during their period of antler growth for trophy hunting purposes. This will still be possible where this is the objective of the land manager. Existing close seasons for female deer have an important function to protect the welfare of dependant young deer, so we are not proposing to remove these.

We are also proposing reviewing existing legislation relating to shooting of deer at night to enable more effective control. The availability of high-quality affordable night vision technology has increased the effectiveness and safety of night shooting which is now commonplace for species other than deer. In many instances, the ability to shoot deer at night can be an effective way to reduce damage. It can be particularly effective where deer have become nocturnal in areas of increased public access where we want to encourage the public to enjoy woodlands. We are therefore proposing that we review the night licence requirement to make it more accessible.

Enclosed deer in deer parks or private collections are subject to the same protections of the Deer Act as wild, free-living deer. This can lead to instances where deer which have been treated with veterinary drugs can enter the food chain as wild deer. There is also a potential animal health risk where enclosed wild deer are captured and transported without pre-movement testing as they are not required to be marked or ear-tagged. We are therefore proposing to clarify the legal status of enclosed wild deer to ensure animal health, welfare and Food Hygiene regulations are not compromised.

## **2.3 Minimising the spread and impacts of non-native deer species**

There are six species of wild deer in England. Red and roe deer are native; fallow, sika, muntjac and Chinese water deer are introduced species. Some areas have up to five species present with densities and impacts varying across the country. The issue of managing non-native species is complex and wide-ranging. Non-native species such as

muntjac cause significant biodiversity impacts to woodlands and can be challenging to locate due to their small size and use of dense undergrowth as cover.

Increasing woodland cover and creating greater connectivity, as set out in the ETAP, is likely to exacerbate the spread of non-native deer species – including those that are currently not widespread, namely, sika and Chinese water deer. This will also further facilitate the spread and impact of Muntjac into other parts of England and into Scotland and may lead to population increases of fallow and sika. Muntjac are of particular concern in terms of biodiversity loss as they may prevent coppice regeneration and contribute to the loss of plants of conservation importance.

We are proposing to review legislation to enable more effective control of the invasive species. This is in addition to considering how the Defra group can identify and monitor deer parks and other collections as possible sources of future escapees of non-native deer, seeking to minimise the risk of escapes.

## **2.4 Deer Health, Welfare and Safety**

An unsustainable deer population can be harmful to the deer themselves, as well as to other animals, plants and invertebrates. Too many deer competing for food in the same area can leave the population malnourished and unhealthy and can allow diseases to spread.

High quality training and standards are essential across the forestry sector, including for the safe, humane and effective management of deer. It is important to ensure that everyone who shoots deer in England has the right ability and skills, which will benefit deer welfare, public safety, food standards and animal disease control.

We are proposing that there should be a mandatory minimum standard for all persons culling deer, this would benefit deer welfare, public safety and food standards.

## **2.5 Wild Venison Market**

The sustainable management of the deer population can also support the development of the wild venison market as a carbon-positive healthy meat and a product of sustainable woodland management. Venison sales are a key part of the deer management cycle and the revenue can help landowners offset deer management costs.

We are proposing that government support the development of a financially and environmentally sustainable wild venison supply chain. We are considering making small grants to contribute to the costs of purchasing and installing the necessary facilities and equipment, where capital cost are a barrier, facilitating the Great Britain Venison Working Group, and working with Food Standards Agency and local authorities on regulatory enablers.

## **2.6 Developing and improving the Evidence Base**

A top priority is to better understand deer populations and their economic, environmental and social impact. Limited deer impact, distribution, density and management data currently exists to inform local and national strategies and future adaptive management approaches.

We are proposing the development of a National Deer Data Dashboard to collate information on risk, deer culled, their impacts and abundance. The data will support an improved understanding of national populations, inform the development of mitigating actions, national priority areas, incentives, policy, food traceability, disease surveillance and monitor management effectiveness.

## 3. Consultation questions

We would welcome your comments on any aspect of this consultation but, in particular, views on the following questions would be appreciated (please give reasons for your answers where appropriate):

### 3.1 Introductory questions

1. **What is your correspondence address?** Please provide an email address or telephone number unless unable to.  
If you enter your email address, then you will automatically receive an acknowledgement email when you submit your response.
2. **Would you like your response to be confidential?** Please see the confidentiality and data protection section at the end of this document (on page 14).
  - Yes
  - No
  - If ticked Yes, please state why
3. **What capacity are you responding to the consultation in?**
  - Individual
  - Research organisation
  - Sector trade body or membership organisation
  - Ecologist
  - Academic
  - Landowner
  - Local Authority
  - Public body
  - Non-governmental organisation
  - Farmer
  - Other (please state)
4. **If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please tell us what organisation this?**  
  
[Free text box]
5. **If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, how were your answers to the questions below determined? (For example, consultation of staff or members, senior management team input, individual, or other)**  
  
[Free text box]



## 3.2 Consultation questions

### Sustainable management (page 4)

**6. To what extent do you support the introduction of incentives for reducing deer impacts to protect woodland?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Do not know

If you answered Disagree or Strongly Disagree, please explain why.

### Improving the laws and regulations on deer (page 5)

**7. We propose to review and amend existing legislation to allow shooting of male deer during the existing close season. To what extent do you support this proposal?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Do not know

If you answered Disagree or Strongly Disagree, please explain why.

**8. We propose to review existing legislation to either reduce or remove the licencing process to permit shooting of deer at night to enable appropriate, proportionate, and effective control. To what extent do you support this proposal?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Do not know

If you answered Disagree or Strongly Disagree, please explain why.

**9. We propose to review deer legislation to enable landowners and managers to reduce deer damage to woodlands or to other public interests, preventing the further spread of non-native species and preventing serious damage to any form of property as well as to the natural environment and public safety. To what extent do you support this proposal?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Do not know

If you answered Disagree or Strongly Disagree, please explain why.

**10. We propose to enable occupiers (tenants or owners) of land to control deer, where the deer rights are retained by the landlord or previous owner (and where serious damage is occurring to trees crops or property), particularly where these are publicly funded. To what extent do you support this proposal?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Do not know

If you answered Disagree or Strongly Disagree, please explain why.

**11. We propose to clarify the legal status of wild deer particularly in relation to enclosed deer in parks or private collections, thereby reducing the likelihood of negative deer welfare or public health issues. To what extent do you support this proposal?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Do not know

If you answered Disagree or Strongly Disagree, please explain why.

**12. We propose a more statutory approach to landowner responsibilities for deer where they are causing significant negative impacts to neighbouring land where these are impacting upon publicly funded woodlands, biodiversity and public interests. To what extent do you support this proposal?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree

- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Do not know

If you answered Disagree or Strongly Disagree, please explain why.

## **Minimising the spread and impacts of non-native deer species (page 5)**

**13. Which actions would you consider, to allow more effective means of controlling muntjac to prevent them damaging woodlands and biodiversity and expanding their range into areas they are not currently present?**

[Free text box]

## **Deer Health, Welfare and Safety (page 6)**

**14. We propose that everyone who culls deer in England has to reach the same standard. To what extent do you support this proposal?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Do not know

If you answered Disagree or Strongly Disagree, please explain why.

**15. What would you consider the most effective means of developing a consistent national approach to responding to deer collisions and deer welfare incidents?**

[Free text box]

## **Wild Venison Market (page 6)**

**16. Do you consider there are presently barriers to the development of a commercially successful wild venison market?**

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

If you answered yes, please explain what these are.

**17. To what extent do you agree that Government should support development of the wild venison sector?**

- Strongly Agree

- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Do not know

If you answered Disagree or Strongly Disagree, please explain why.

## **Developing and improving the Evidence Base (page 7)**

### **18. To what extent do you support the development of a National Deer Data Dashboard?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Do not know

If you answered Disagree or Strongly Disagree, please explain why.

## **Financial implications of proposed strategy actions.**

### **19. Do you believe any of the proposed actions will have any positive or negative financial implications for the woodland/land management sector?**

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

If you answered Yes, please explain what the implications are.

### **20. Do you believe any of the proposed actions will have any positive or negative financial implications for those involved in deer management?**

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

If you answered Yes, please explain what the implications are.

### **21. Do you believe any of the proposed actions will have any positive or negative financial implications for wild venison production?**

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

If you answered Yes, please explain what the implications are.

## 4. How to respond

Please respond to this consultation using the Citizen Space consultation hub at:  
[consult.defra.gov.uk](https://consult.defra.gov.uk)

For ease of analysis, responses via the Citizen Space platform would be preferred, but alternative options are provided below if required:

By email to: [ncf.treeprogramme@defra.gov.uk](mailto:ncf.treeprogramme@defra.gov.uk)

In writing to:

Consultation Coordinator

Defra 2nd Floor

Foss House

Kings Pool, 1 to 2 Peasholme Green

York

YO1 7PX

## 5. Confidentially and data protections

This discussion document and consultation process have been planned to adhere to the Consultation Principles issued by the Cabinet Office.

Representative groups are asked to give a summary of the people and organisations they represent and where relevant who else they have consulted in reaching their conclusions when they respond.

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal data, may be published or disclosed in accordance with the access to information regimes these are primarily the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs), the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA). We have obligations, mainly under the EIRs, FOIA and DPA, to disclose information to particular recipients or to the public in certain circumstances.

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, as a public authority, the Department is bound by the Freedom of Information Act and may therefore be obliged to disclose all or some of the information you provide. In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential.

If we receive a request for disclosure of the information, we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.

This consultation is being conducted in line with the Cabinet Office's [consultation principles](#).

If you have any comments or complaints about the consultation process, address them to: Consultation Coordinator Area 7C, Nobel House 17 Smith Square London SW1P 3JR Or email: [consultation.coordinator@defra.gov.uk](mailto:consultation.coordinator@defra.gov.uk)

## 6. What happens next?

We will consider responses to this consultation and aim to publish a summary, noting the Secretary of State's final conclusions, within 12 weeks of the closing date.