

The Deer Initiative

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Collaborative Deer Management – The RELU project

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Traditionally, wildlife resources are managed by a combination of biological experts and government agencies acting within a policy and legislative framework. However, the increasing diversity and abundance of stakeholders that can interact with wildlife coupled with increasing abundance of some wildlife resources can lead to conflicts because of misunderstanding or disagreement over the associated impacts.

Collaborative resource management provides a mechanism to recognise the human dimension and make this integral to wildlife management. This requires the development of new techniques to develop informed stakeholder input and involvement in decision making. Stakeholders recognise that an understanding of the interaction between the ecology of a natural resource and its use for the generation of social and economic value is fundamental to achieving sustainability but realise that barriers such as the lack of integration among scientific disciplines and poor communication between researchers, policy makers and practitioners need to be overcome.

We have developed a research program that aims to investigate the application of this approach to the management of deer in the UK. Increasing deer numbers has increased concerns over deer-related road traffic accidents, economic losses to forestry, agriculture and horticulture, damage to biodiversity interests yet there is unrealised potential in the benefits from deer such as venison income, recreation and deer management associated jobs and livelihoods. Deer management provides a tractable model system for examining the role of collaboration in a sustainable rural economy:

1. Deer bring direct and indirect financial costs and benefits to a wide range of stakeholders across society.
2. Collaboration initiatives among stakeholders are readily found in current policy frameworks affecting deer management across the UK.
3. Stakeholders are drawn from all sectors of society and display a wide range of values, concerns and perceptions.
4. Deer management occurs across a range of locations that are highly diversified in terms of habitat and socio-economic context and across temporal-spatial scales.

5. Land-use policies (e.g. CAP) impacting on deer management are under reform which provides an opportunity for assessing how these reforms can influence value capture, commodity provision and sustainability within rural economies.

The objectives of this research are to investigate a) how collaboration and participatory techniques can increase the sustainable management of a natural resource and b) how an integrated scientific approach (economic, social and natural sciences) can be developed to address gaps in knowledge and enhance knowledge exchange to resolve management disputes in multi-stakeholder management environments.

Using a suite of contrasting case studies the research activities will investigate how different strategies for stakeholder involvement can be used to develop methods and agree a range of acceptable management actions that enhance the economic, environmental and social value captured from deer and reduce conflicts over perceived impacts. This talk outlines the rationale, aims and objectives of this project and focuses on novel methods, activities and preliminary results.

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