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ENGLAND'S TREES, WOODS AND FORESTS

**A response from the Deer Initiative to a DEFRA consultation paper
August 2006**

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the above consultation.

The Deer Initiative (DI) is a wide partnership of statutory, non-statutory, voluntary and private interests. Whilst originally set up by the Forestry Commission and still, in the main, funded by the Forestry Commission and English Nature, it has a core staff whose activities are both to co-ordinate the relevant activities of the partners and to deliver some functions directly. The aim of the DI is “to ensure the delivery of a sustainable, well managed wild deer population in England and Wales”. The staff and finances of the DI are managed through the DI Ltd, a charitable company limited by guarantee, dedicated to supporting the DI. This response reflects the views of the staff of the DI and the discussions with our partner organizations. However each of our partner organizations will no doubt respond separately to reflect their particular interest in this matter.

We have agreed with Government¹ that the role of DI Ltd will include:

- Advice to government (central and local) and our partners on national and regional needs, support and priorities for sustainable management of wild deer.

¹ The Sustainable management of wild deer populations in England: An Action Plan, December 2004.

- Acting as a central focal point for improved communications on all matters relating to wild deer for the Partnership, landowners, land managers and the public.
- Co-ordinating partners efforts to develop and promote best practice in all aspects of wild deer management.

Our remit extends only to wild deer and their management and we have therefore confined ourselves to answering the specific questions that are directly concerned with the future management and impacts of deer on our woodlands and forests.

General

We believe that the previous forestry strategy published in 1998 signalled a major shift in how forestry was viewed and how it operated in England. We welcome the opportunity to contributing to moving policy on again through this review of the strategy and look forward to working with Natural England and the Forestry Commission to develop and implement the action plan that will accompany the new strategy.

We recognise the various challenges and opportunities that are listed on page 10 of the consultation and that these are likely to lead to changes to the extent and distribution of our trees, woods and forests. This will have an inevitable influence on the distribution of our wild deer population and thus their management. **We believe therefore that it is essential that any review of the strategy takes place in the context of wild deer and their impacts.**

All species of deer, except Chinese water deer are increasing in numbers and expanding their ranges in England and Wales. Fallow, roe and muntjac deer are now widespread, while red and sika are locally abundant.^{2,3,4,5} It is now believed that deer of at least one species are present in nearly every 10 kilometre square of Great Britain.⁶ This has been encouraged by changes in land use, particularly the expansion of forestry that has increased suitable habitat for foraging and shelter. The geographic range of deer species

² TROUT R.C., PUTMAN R.J., MOORE N., & HART J, (1994) *A Review of Lowland Deer*, Report VC 0308 to Countryside Division LUCC, MAFF, London.

³ PUTMAN R.J. (1995) *Status and Impact of Deer in the Lowlands and Options for Management*. Technical Report to MAFF Contract VC 0316.

⁴ ALBON S. et al (1998) Desk and Limited Field Studies to analyse the major factor influencing regional deer population and ranging behaviour. Technical Report to MAFF Contract VC 0314.

⁵ HARRIS S., MORRIS P., WRAY S. & YALDEN D.W. (1995) *A Review of British Mammals: Population estimates and conservation status of British mammals other than cetaceans*. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough; 168pp.

⁶ MAYLE B.A., & STAINES B.W., (1997) *An Overview of Methods Used for Estimating the Size of Deer Populations in Great Britain*, from Population Ecology, Management and Welfare of Deer, Proceedings of a symposium held in Manchester, April 1997, Manchester Metropolitan University.

has been increasing by between 1-5% annually for the last 40 years.⁷ Researchers believe that there is currently no reason why the trend in increasing deer numbers and range expansion should not continue.⁸

Yet despite these issues people wish to see deer in the wild. In many areas where deer are considered by ecologists and foresters to be a pest the general public do not believe that they pose a threat to woodlands. The increasing demand for public access and rising deer numbers will inevitably raise the need for sensitive management.

However, virtually all British Woodlands have evolved in the presence of deer and deer play an important role in creating a diverse environment, which favours many plants and animals. Deer also impact on the tree crop, agricultural and horticultural crops adjacent to the woodland and also in suburban and even urban areas, and may visit and damage gardens. The growth in the number of deer, in conjunction with the growth in road traffic means that there are an increasing number of road traffic accidents involving deer.

The partners in the DI believe that whilst the relationship between deer and sustainable forestry is important, effective deer management can only be achieved by examining also the wider effects on the environment and its biodiversity, agriculture, horticulture, transport, rural and urban living.

We believe that in future if deer are to be managed well, it must be at a landscape, or at least deer range scale. Cooperative management across land holding boundaries is therefore a pre-requisite of effective management.

Our responses to the specific questions are attached at Annex A.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Watson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'P'.

Peter Watson
Executive Director

⁷ GILL R.M.A., (2001) The deer explosion. Tree News, Autumn 2001 p22-25.

⁸ FULLER R & GILL R, (2001), Ecological impacts of increasing numbers of deer in British woodland. Forestry 74, p193-200.

Responses on the specific consultation questions

Principles and Objectives of Government intervention

Question 1: Do you agree with these principles and objectives of Government intervention in trees, woods and forests? If not, what principles and objectives should guide Government intervention?

We agree with the general principles and objectives set out in the consultation, but will wish to explore the detail of how these are developed and applied in practice. Having the necessary resources to implement the strategy will be the real test and without this the strategy, whilst sound in direction, will be ineffective.

Types of Government Action

Question 2: Do any regulations present a barrier to the sustainable management of trees, woods and forests and associated businesses and activities? If so, what changes should be made?

We recognise that the regulations associated with protected sites (SSSIs) and landscapes (AONBs, National Parks) are often perceived as restricting sustainable management of trees and woods. However we do not believe that this need be the case in practice. We believe that such designations are essential if we are to protect the most valuable woodlands from the impacts of wild deer. However we believe that the applicant or land-owner should receive an integrated package of advice and incentives alongside any constraints in response to their proposals.

How will national priorities influence action on the ground?

Question 5: Do you think we have got the balance right between the way national priorities will be expressed in the new Strategy and the scope for regional delivery to respond to local needs and opportunities?

We have been closely involved in developing the sustainable deer management as part of the various regional forestry frameworks and will subsequently be committed to their delivery. We understand from the workshops provided by Defra as part of the consultation process that the new strategy is to be an articulation of national priorities and that the current Regional Forestry Frameworks are a regional expression of the strategy currently being reviewed. Earlier this year LTS consulting undertook a piece of work for Forestry Commission England reviewing the Regional Forestry Frameworks. The consultants concluded that 'Overall the relationship between the Regional Forestry Frameworks and the revised England Forestry Strategy seems unclear as does the extent to which Regional Forestry Frameworks are to be subordinate to national policies, strategies and plans'. We believe that the new strategy should not hamper regional implementation,

but rather set the stage for their future developments, by identifying the major challenges, (such as the PSA target for SSSIs) and indicating common standards or approaches that should apply across all regions.

Biodiversity

Question 13: How and where could other Government policies contribute to delivering our biodiversity aims for trees and woodland?

Question 14: How can Government best support its delivery partners in achieving these aims?

The strategy should acknowledge the various agreed targets for biodiversity, both in terms of special sites (PSA target to bring SSSIs into Favourable Condition by 2010) and the broader targets in the England Biodiversity Action Plan. Action across government and private landowners is needed to address various issues that are currently threatening woods, such as the management of deer.

It is essential that the Strategy recognises that there is a wealth of expertise, energy and commitment by both private and public sector woodland owners and managers to support the Governments aims for trees and woodlands. What is required is financial support from the Government to enable the owners and managers to achieve these. The key role of Government is to facilitate the collaboration of the many stakeholders to ensure that the aims of the strategy can be delivered. The Deer Initiative Partnership provides an example of how the strategy can be translated into action at a national, regional and local level by developing a shared vision and making the best use of the financial and in-kind contributions of the participating organisations to produce the maximum public benefit.

Landscape

Question 16: How and where could other Government policies contribute to delivering our landscape aims for trees and woodland?

Question 17: How can Government best support its delivery partners in achieving these aims?

Many of the comments made under questions 13 and 14 apply equally to the delivery of landscape objectives as well as of biodiversity targets.

Skills and Knowledge transfer

Q26: Do local authorities have access to the expertise, resources and technical support they need to manage our urban tree stock?

We are not able to respond in detail to this question but it is important to recognise the values of existing trees and ensure that sufficient resources are available to properly manage these as well as establishing new trees for the future. Our experience shows that there is a dearth of specialist knowledge of deer management in this sector and the key for the future will be to ensure that there is easy access to the necessary support to manage the inevitable spread of wild deer into urban areas.

Question 28: Do you agree that Government support for capacity building innovation and other supply-chain initiatives can contribute significantly to the profitability of woodland management?

Question 29: What are the priorities for capacity building and innovation?

A commonly encountered problem is putting together woodland owners and the various individuals who may be interested in managing their wood or selling its produce (including venison). We believe that there is great scope for further development of local networks and we are currently supporting a number of regional and local initiatives to promote a sustainable, quality assured venison market. Whilst not a key priority in the woodland strategy this is another area where other government strategies need to recognise that not all woodland products are based on timber production.