Tahr Control Operational Plan: 1 July 2023–30 June 2024

Purpose

To detail an annual plan of work that moves towards achieving the objectives of the Himalayan Thar Management Policy 1991 and Himalayan Thar Control Plan 1993 (HTCP), within the context of the statutes for which lands are administered.

Context

The Department of Conservation (DOC) and Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu continue to give effect to the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in relation to implementing the HTCP. This plan has been informed by the results of previous tahr control operational plans,[1] results of monitoring tahr populations, and contributions from members of the Tahr Plan Implementation Liaison Group (TPILG). While our understanding of tahr in the landscape has developed substantially in recent years, the complexity of managing that system has also become more apparent. Within that complexity, we are implementing the adaptive approach to management envisaged in the HTCP. This requires a collaborative commitment to working flexibly within uncertainty. In the 2023/24 year, the programme can build on substantial information from previous years, including:

- updated data on tahr populations
- a large-scale pilot of tahr browse impact-assessment protocols
- progress towards developing hunter-led management in Management Unit 1 (MU1)
- successful implementation of ground-based tahr control (DOC- and hunter-led)
- strategic planning for tahr control outside the feral range.

Over the 2023/24 year, the TPILG will continue to provide for effective collaboration amongst parties with interests in the implementation of the HTCP. This will include advising DOC and working together to enhance contributions to HTCP implementation. Work this year will build on 2022/23 discussions regarding longer-term strategies. This may add a longer-term vision to the ongoing work of optimising contributions from recreational hunting, hunter-led management activities, commercial tahr recovery, and aerially assisted trophy hunting (AATH).

Some effects of COVID-19 may remain in play for the 2023/24 year, and different challenges may also arise from the return of international tourism (e.g. the projected substantial return of AATH clients). The commitment of all parties to effectively managing tahr remains strong, and government commitment to the tahr programme has not changed.

[1] See the Previous Tahr Control Operations Plans webpage on DOC's website at **www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/things-to-do/hunting/what-to-hunt/tahr/tahr-control-operations/tahr-control-operational-plans**

Scope

Included: This Tahr Control Operational Plan (TCOP) covers management of tahr from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024, including:

- control of tahr on public conservation land (PCL)
- contributions from recreational and concession hunting, including hunter-led management activities, guiding, commercial tahr recovery, and AATH
- contributions to implementing the HTCP on land tenures other than PCL
- research and monitoring relating to tahr.

Excluded: This document does not deal with:

- tahr control beyond 30 June 2024
- issues beyond the scope of the HTCP (e.g. new/altered access to PCL)
- issues within the HTCP that are beyond the scope of operational planning (e.g. tahr farming)
- operational issues that would require a change to the HTCP (e.g. changes to tahr population/density targets or management unit boundaries).

Contributions to control

A suite of contributors will deliver measures to control tahr populations as required to move towards the goals of the HTCP. Forms of control are listed below.

- Recreational hunting contributes substantially within the feral range. Hunting will be encouraged by proactive communication with recreational hunting permit holders (including providing information on observations of tahr) and ballots.
- Hunter-led management may start in MU1 and contribute additional tahr control during this TCOP period, through a partnership between hunting organisations and Te Rūnanga o Arowhenua.
- Additional structured recreational hunting opportunities will contribute to implementing the HTCP within the feral range.
- Guided hunting, including AATH, will contribute in areas permitted by concessions. AATH trophy harvest is undertaken by concessionaires on PCL and is governed by DOC permit conditions and a code of practice developed by the Game Animal Council (GAC).
- For each AATH trophy taken on PCL, an operator is required to undertake an environmental offset (i.e. the control of five female/juvenile tahr). Based on 2023 bookings from guides and AATH activity reporting to date, AATH environmental offset will substantially contribute to tahr control within the feral range in the 2023/24 year. The timing and location of environmental offset control are directed by DOC.
- Commercial tahr carcass recovery may contribute over the year as allowed on non-PCL and under the conditions of concessions to be applied for and issued for PCL.
- Official control funded by DOC will continue in national parks, within management units and the feral range, and also outside the feral range. Indicative control allocations are provided in this plan but will be refined throughout the season based on information including the level of other contributions to control (e.g. AATH environmental offsets), further data on tahr populations, and opportunities for operational efficiency.

Applying a flexible approach

DOC, in collaboration with the TPILG members, is committed to using the best available information, including stakeholder knowledge. This approach will be enhanced over coming years as better data become available and longer-term strategies are enabled; in the short term, this requires flexibility in the delivery of this plan.

Approximately halfway through the official control hours period, a review will be carried out to consider optimal use of the remaining control effort. This review will involve the GAC.

DOC's control of tahr to date has focused on PCL, but it is recognised that tahr are present at high densities on other tenures in some areas. The HTCP 1993 applies across tenures; greater efforts by other land managers to control tahr populations will assist tahr control outcomes across and outside the feral range.

To enhance opportunities for collaborative learning and advance understandings on key issues of common concern, DOC intends to:

- adapt the official control resource allocation throughout the 2023/24 year to optimise the cumulative effect of control from all sources; the resources external to DOC will become more apparent during the season, requiring an adaptive approach (e.g. AATH environmental offsets are expected to be substantial but total numbers will not be known until all concession returns are received (~September))
- continue working with hunting organisations, Te Rūnanga o Arowhenua, and Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu to support implementation of hunter-led management in MU1
- apply lessons from the 2021/22 and 2022/23 TCOPs to further optimise contributions from targeted recreational hunting
- encourage and support other agencies and land managers to contribute to improving landscape-scale tahr control outcomes
- work with the TPILG to establish longer-term strategies for implementing the HTCP.

Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

Research and monitoring

Implementation of the HTCP requires continued research and monitoring. In the 2023/24 year, this work will include DOC's own planned programme, collaborative programmes, and facilitating the work of others to:

- analyse data and report results from the preceding 3-year programme to remeasure historic vegetation plots
- evaluate the 2022/23 pilot programme to assess tahr browse impacts and, based on that evaluation, decide whether to implement a full programme in 2023/24, including elements of mātauranga Māori
- use and build on existing and new information about tahr populations to inform future management action (e.g. population modelling)
- support initiatives to improve recreational hunters' contributions to tahr control.

Operational specifications

Total effort on public conservation land

Acknowledging that an adaptive management approach may require flexibility in operational decisions, the initial planned official control effort for 2023/24 is 240 hours of aerial search and control or equivalent official effort via other delivery methods. This level of effort and its indicative allocation across and beyond the feral range were determined based on available resources (DOC and other contributors), data, and observations from previous operational plans and contributions from DOC staff and TPILG members.

Outside the feral range, an indicative total of approximately 110–130 hours of search and control effort is allocated for the 2023/24 year. Resources will be directed to areas where the risk of further dispersal is greatest and/or environmental impacts are highest. Any practical, opportunistic tahr control outside the feral range that is integrated with other control operations (e.g. wallaby/goat/pig control) will represent additional effort to the 110–130 hours.

An indicative total of approximately 110–130 hours of control effort inside the feral range is allocated for 2023/24. Allocation of official control resources within the feral range will reflect the priorities outlined below.

Allocation of the control resource will be managed adaptively to optimise the cumulative effect of official control and additional external contributions, including AATH environmental offsets and structured recreational hunting opportunities.

Priorities for control for 2023/24

Priorities for this year are to:

- continue applying a strategic approach to official tahr control outside the feral range (including exclusion zones), targeting all tahr (including identifiable males)
- assess the feasibility of eliminating high-risk outlying populations outside the feral range
- prevent spread from the feral range by removing tahr from areas within the feral range outside the management units, particularly near the feral range boundary (identifiable males will not be targeted)
- take the Aoraki / Mount Cook and Westland Tai Poutini national parks to the lowest practicable tahr density (to achieve this, official control will be optimised to target breeding populations, but all tahr encountered (including identifiable males) will be controlled)
- within management units, target official control to areas of highest tahr impact and/or where control presents particular challenges (e.g. West Coast forest ecosystems)
- do not control identifiable males in operations undertaken in management units 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7 or outside the management units but inside the feral range
- bring the overall tahr population towards intervention levels in the HTCP by optimising the cumulative effect of all control sources, e.g. AATH environmental offsets will be directed by DOC, likely targeting areas of highest tahr density where less official control is planned (see table below).

Control tools for 2023/2024

As a principle, DOC will continue to enable reduction of tahr populations as required by the HTCP, utilising a variety of available control methods. In particular, in 2023/24, DOC will:

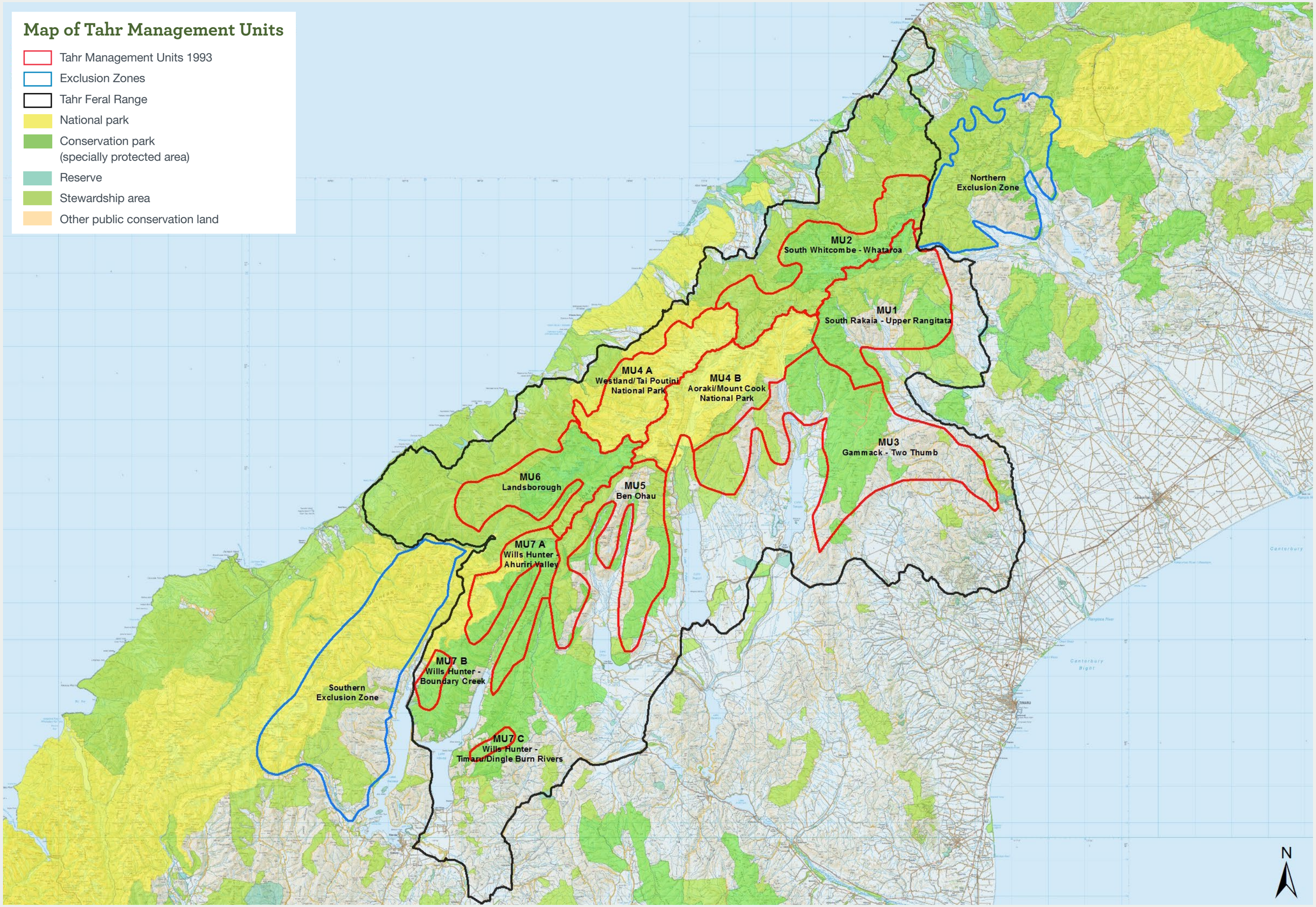
- increase investment in official ground-based hunting where the circumstances suggest this is an efficient method
- vary the approaches to aerial control (e.g. timing, location, new technologies) to improve efficiency and reduce animal habituation to control methods
- continue existing contributions to population management approaches through structured recreational hunting opportunities, including the Hooker-Landsborough and Adams winter tahr ballot
- further enhance control through new recreational hunting contributions (e.g. hunter-led management in MU1 and targeted management hunts)
- work with guided hunting and commercial recovery operators to encourage and facilitate opportunities for commercial control, including directing the delivery of AATH environmental offsets (offsets are an additional resource to official control but will have the greatest benefit when delivered as part of an integrated programme)
- work collaboratively with others to understand and improve recreational hunter participation and effectiveness (this will include providing information on maps of known high-density areas, identifiable male sightings, and easy-to-access areas with high numbers, and communicating directly with hunting permit holders).

Official control work in the feral range

- All operations shall record data in a standardised way and meet DOC's minimum requirements for tahr control.
- Control data shall be made publicly available once verified (as per previous years).
- Where practicable, official aerial control within the feral range will be concentrated between 1 July and 15 November 2023 to avoid kid-drop and peak recreational use periods.
- DOC will work with AATH concessionaires to, where practicable, deliver environmental offsets between 1 July and 15 November 2023. More certainty will be available after February–April 2023 AATH concessionaire activity returns are assessed.
- Ground-based control may occur at other times.
- No official control or AATH activities (trophy hunting or offsets) will be carried out in tahr ballot areas until 15 July 2023 to avoid conflict with the ballot period.
- Control activities will consider recreational users, including hut users and/or hunters/trampers/climbers, etc. If recreational users are sighted, the control shall move to another location.
- No official aerial control shall take place over a public holiday weekend.
- DOC will advise when the official aerial control in a management unit has been completed for the year.

Map of Tahr Management Units

- Tahr Management Units 1993
- Exclusion Zones
- Tahr Feral Range
- National park
- Conservation park (specially protected area)
- Reserve
- Stewardship area
- Other public conservation land



Priority order of management unit in Himalayan Thar Control Plan 1993	Intervention levels of tahr/km² and population size in Himalayan Thar Control Plan 1993	Control parameters in Himalayan Thar Control Plan 1993	Control priority in meeting Himalayan Thar Control Plan 1993 targets	Approach: ▸ Control tools are applied adaptively throughout the season to optimise the cumulative effect of control from all sources. ▸ Recreational hunting will contribute throughout the feral range. ▸ Official control gives priority to preventing spread beyond the feral range, reducing toward zero density in national parks, and targeting populations of higher density and/or where substantial impacts are observed. ▸ Landowners with feral tahr will be encouraged to reduce densities to HTCP targets. ▸ AATH environmental offsets will be employed as a control tool at the direction of DOC, in addition to the planned 240 hours of official control.			
				Recreational hunting	**Guided hunting: ground-based guided hunting throughout the period; AATH where permitted between 10 February and 31 August, subject to exclusions listed below[1]**	**Commercial tahr recovery, including taking bull tahr for capes (Requires a permit – may include Christmas and roar closures)**	**Official control represented by allocated aerial control hours (or equivalent investment in alternative methods); resource allocation here is indicative and will be adapted during the TCOP period to reflect best available information and optimise the cumulative effect of all control sources; the available official control resource is approximately 240 hours, in addition to external sources (e.g. AATH environmental offsets)**
Outside feral range	Eliminate spread.	Control all tahr.	Official control incorporating ground surveillance in critical areas.				Approximately 110–130 hours of official search and control.[2] All tahr encountered will be controlled. Scope feasibility of eradicating high-priority outlying populations.
Inside feral range but outside the management units	No current target.	Intent is to constrain breeding population and prevent migration to outside feral range.		Encourage hunters to look for, shoot, and report tahr.		1 July 2023–30 June 2024.[3]	High priority for official aerial control, although AATH environmental offsets may be applied in areas of higher density. 10–20 hours official control investment, integrated with MU control and applied flexibly along feral range–MU boundaries. Identifiable males will not be targeted.
I. Wills/Makarora Hunter (Management Unit 7)	<1.0/km² and population of <100.	Tahr densities not to exceed 5/km² for any localised area. Female-kid groups to be restricted, especially close to unit boundaries, to 10 or fewer per group. Recreational and commercial hunting encouraged, official control where not within set levels.	Encourage recreational and commercial hunting first. Official control as required.	Encourage hunters to look for, shoot, and report tahr.	No AATH within Hāwea Conservation Park during roar ballot period.	1 July 2023–30 June 2024.[3] Carcass recovery to target nannies and juveniles only.	Aerial control to be delivered through a combination of AATH environmental offsets and official aerial control. 0–5 hours official control investment. Identifiable males will not be targeted.
II. Landsborough (Management Unit 6)	1.5/km² and population of 900.		Encourage increased recreational, guided, and commercial hunting. Official control as required.	Encourage hunters to look for, shoot, and report tahr. Ballots in wilderness area. Continue structured recreational hunting opportunities.	No AATH within tahr ballot areas (Hooker/Landsborough Wilderness Area) before 15 July 2023. No AATH within the Cook River / Weheka to Haast River Conservation Area during the Haast roar ballot period.	1 July 2023–30 June 2024[3] outside the Hooker/Landsborough Wilderness Area tahr ballot area. 15 July 2023 – ballot commencement 2024[3] within ballot area. Carcass recovery to target nannies and juveniles only.	High priority for control inside the feral range. Aerial control to be delivered through a combination of AATH environmental offsets and official aerial control. High priority for ground-based official control and recreational management hunts to target areas of known forest impacts. 10–20 hours official control investment. Identifiable males will not be targeted.
III. Aoraki/Mount Cook and Westland Tai Poutini national parks (Management Unit 4)	<1.0/km² and population of <500.		Recreational, guided, and commercial hunting. Official control as required to reduce to zero density targeting all tahr.	Explore additional opportunities for hunters to look for, shoot, and report tahr.	Westland Tai Poutini National Park – no AATH south of Karangarua Range and The Sierra Range ridgeline before 14 July 2023.	1 July 2023–30 June 2024.[3]	High priority for official control inside feral range – with a focus on reducing tahr numbers to as close to zero density as practicable. AATH environmental offsets may be applied in addition to the official control. 60–90 hours official control investment. Operations to be optimised to reduce breeding populations but will control all tahr encountered.
IV. South Whitcombe/ Wanganui/ Whataroa (Management Unit 2)	2.0/km² and population of 1,500.		Encourage increased recreational and guided hunting, then commercial recovery. Official control as required.	Encourage hunters to look for, shoot, and report tahr. Ballots in wilderness area.	No AATH within tahr ballot areas (Adams Wilderness Area) before 15 July 2023.	1 July 2023–30 June 2024[3] outside the Adams Wilderness Area tahr ballot area. 15 July 2023 – ballot commencement 2024[3] within ballot area. Carcass recovery to target nannies and juveniles only.	Aerial control to be delivered through a combination of AATH environmental offsets and official aerial control. Ground-based official control to target areas of known forest impacts. Identifiable males will not be targeted. 5–15 hours official control investment.
V. Ben Ohau (Management Unit 5)	2.5/km² and population of 1,800.		Encourage increased landowner control and recreational and guided hunting first, then commercial recovery. Official control as required.	Encourage hunters to look for, shoot, and report tahr.	No AATH in Ahuriri Conservation Park before 1 May 2024.	1 July 2023–30 June 2024.[3] Carcass recovery to target nannies and juveniles only.	Aerial control to be delivered through AATH environmental offsets. Identifiable males will not be targeted.
VI. South Rakaia/ Rangitata (Management Unit 1)	2.5/km² and population of 2,000.		Encourage recreational hunting first, then guided hunting, then commercial recovery. Official control as required.	Encourage hunters to look for, shoot, and report tahr through hunter-led management.	No AATH in Te Kahui Kaupeka Conservation Park before 1 May 2024. Activities to be integrated with hunter-led management where possible.	Potential for integration with hunter-led management to be explored.	Aerial control to be delivered through a combination of AATH environmental offsets and official aerial control, integrated with hunter-led management. Identifiable males will not be targeted. 0–5 hours official control investment.
VII. Gammack/ Two Thumb (Management Unit 3)	2.0/km² and population of 3,000.		Encourage landowner control. Increase recreational and guided hunting first, then commercial recovery. Official control as required.	Encourage hunters to look for, shoot, and report tahr. Explore structured recreational hunting opportunities.	No AATH in Te Kahui Kaupeka Conservation Park before 1 May 2024.	1 July 2023–30 June 2024.[3] Carcass recovery to target nannies and juveniles only.	Aerial control to be delivered through AATH environmental offsets. Identifiable males will not be targeted.

[1] Information presented here is based on permit conditions at the time of writing. Future changes to permit conditions may occur, in which case this plan should be updated.

[2] Operational effort is specified in terms of hours of helicopter-based aerial hunting as this is the primary historic method for tahr control. However, the allocated effort may be delivered under this plan as a comparable investment in alternative methods (e.g. ground-based control).

[3] Specific place- and/or date-based exclusions may apply within this time period, including operational exclusions over the Christmas and roar periods.

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