Sika Herd of Special Interest Proposal Summary

The Central North Island Sika Foundation (CNISF) has proposed establishing a Herd of Special Interest (HOSI) for sika deer in the Kaimanawa and Kaweka Forest Parks.

The objectives the Central North Island Sika Foundation are proposing:

The proposal aims to manage the sika deer herd within the designated area to a level that is compatible with:

Ecological Objectives

- Achieving seedling growth for canopy species leading to sustainable forest canopy regeneration
- supporting the protection of biodiversity values in the Northwest Kaimanawa and Northwest Kaweka Forest Park and where unique local biodiversity values exist (e.g. land snails).

Hunting Objectives

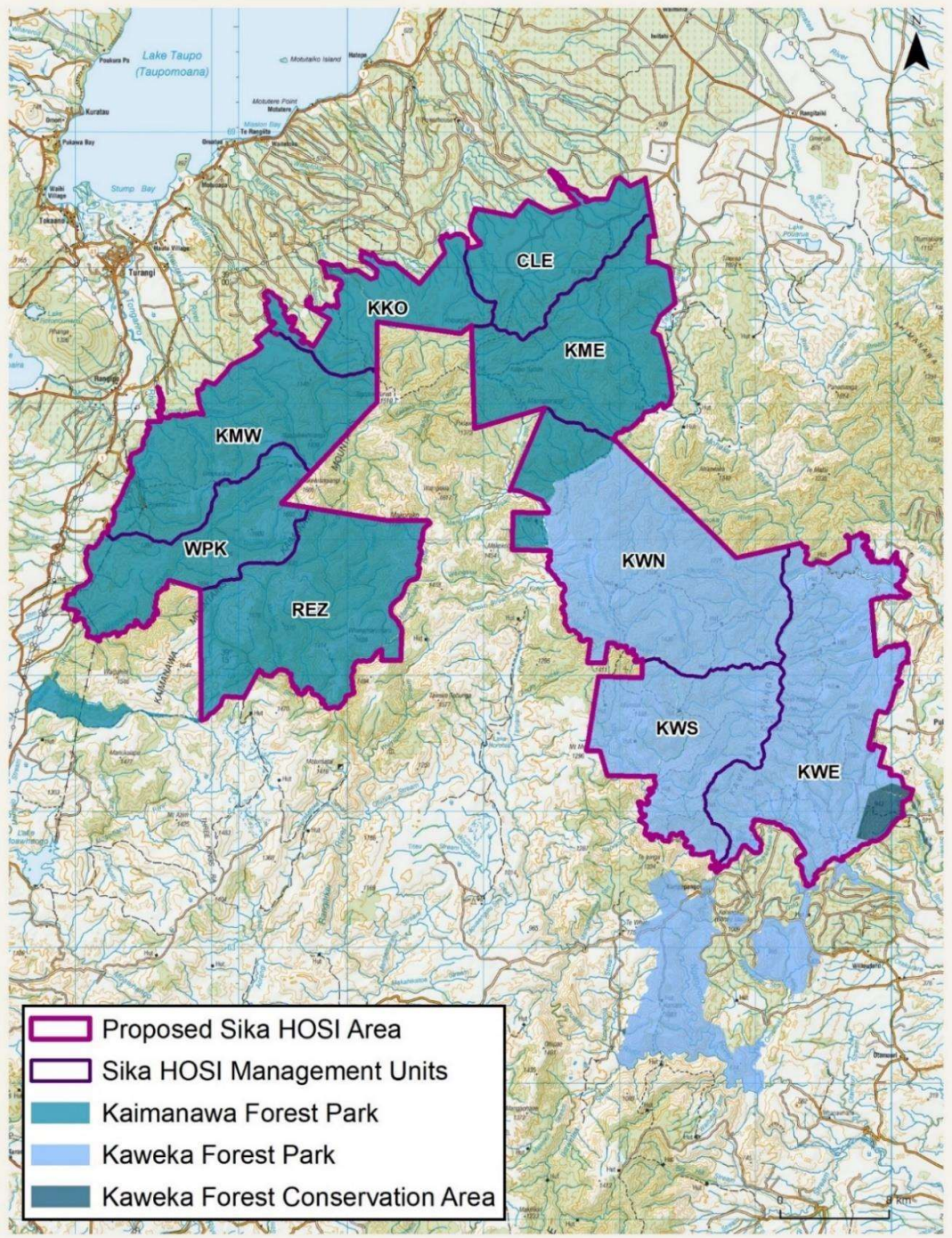
- Enhancing or maintaining hunter contributions to sika population management
- enhancing or maintaining hunter satisfaction with sika venison quality and the overall sika hunting experience
- facilitating and optimising hunter access.

Collaboration Objectives

- Providing hunters, iwi, stakeholders and interested parties' opportunities to actively contribute to and participate in the management of the sika herd
- enabling representatives of organisations that promote hunting or shooting in recreational hunting areas to provide advice on the management of the Kaimanawa and Kaweka Recreational Hunting Areas.

The area proposed to be managed:

Figure 1. Map of the proposed HOSI area.



The operations proposed:

The HOSI is intended to be divided into 9 management units. Each unit will have its vegetation and herd health assessed which will guide the management activities required.

Depending on the level of management required in each management unit the following methods will be applied:

Professional interventions (i.e. those that require the procurement of specialists, e.g. contracted aerial or ground-based hunters):

- Knockdown – professional sika population reduction (female focus) across an entire MU.
- Targeted knockdown – professional sika population reduction (female focus) across localised areas within a MU.
- Maintenance – professionally limiting sika population increases across an entire MU.
- Targeted maintenance – professionally limiting sika population increases across localised areas within a MU.

Hunting interventions (i.e. those directly undertaken directly or facilitated by the CNISF):

- Coordinated maintenance – actively limiting sika population increases by facilitating hunting activities and access.
- Passive maintenance – encouraging hunting that limits sika population increases.

Forest and herd health data will guide all management activities to achieve the objectives. For example, if forest health indicators are not improving, additional deer control would be implemented. The sex ratio of the herd may also be adjusted to enhance hunter experiences.

Community involvement proposed:

The proposal aims to create opportunities for hunters, iwi, and interested parties to actively contribute to managing the sika herd. This includes providing information and education on the sika herd and its management to hunters and the wider community.

The Sika Foundation also plans to continue supporting broader conservation efforts, such as protecting threatened species through predator management and species monitoring.

HOSI management proposed:

The Minister can only delegate the management of a HOSI to DOC or the New Zealand Game Animal Council. This proposal suggests that the Game Animal Council manage the sika HOSI, with DOC providing administrative and operational support. The Sika Foundation would be contracted to undertake operational delivery on behalf of the GAC.

The funding proposed:

The proposal estimates that administering the HOSI will cost between $823,000 and $917,000 annually. The Sika Foundation will contribute between $313,000 and $426,000, with the remaining costs funded by the Crown. The Sika Foundation anticipate meeting a greater proportion of the costs over time.

Further information on The Central North Island Sika Foundation and its proposal can be found at www.sikafoundation.co.nz

Summary of the effect of sika deer in the Kaimanawa and Kaweka Forest Parks

Mature beech forest in the central North Island periodically dies off naturally, creating large gaps in the forest canopy. Historically, these forests have regenerated after die-offs, closing the gaps and restoring the canopy. However, in recent decades some beech forests have struggled to regenerate, or regeneration has become patchy.

The reasons for this are complex and often the result of multiple factors. Evidence shows introduced deer, initially red deer and later sika deer, have negatively affected the regeneration of beech in some areas. Other factors include fire, possums, rats eating beech seeds, and the loss of marine nutrients due to introduced predators wiping out historic seabird breeding colonies. Despite these factors, deer browsing on beech seedlings and saplings is a key issue affecting regeneration at some sites.

Where hunting has effectively controlled sika deer density, beech forests are regenerating. In areas with inadequate hunting and high sika deer populations, no saplings survive to fill canopy gaps, and the forest turns to low scrubland.

Image 1. Mountain Beech canopy dieback in Kaweka Forest Park in the 1990's. Photo credit: DOC.

In 1998, the Kaweka Mountain Beech Project started to address the issue in the Kaweka Forest Park, and the Kaweka Hunter Liaison Group was formed. The group decided to use aerial deer control, supplemented by enhanced recreational hunting, as the method to tackle the problem.

From 1998 to 2015, aerial deer control was conducted over approximately 20,000 hectares of the park. Data from this operation allowed Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research to model the effectiveness of different deer control methods on canopy regeneration. You can read the report here: Consequences of deer control for Kaweka mountain beech forest dynamics

Their modelling found that with fencing, a forest gap could get enough saplings to close the canopy within 40 years, and most within 20 years. With aerial hunting, most plots achieved enough saplings within 40 years, with most taking between 20 and 40 years. However, with recreational hunting alone, most plots take longer

than 40 years, with some taking over 80 years. Some plots under recreational hunting didn't reach the minimum number of seedlings even after 100 years.

Long term management aims to reduce and maintain a smaller sika population to ensure a sub-canopy tier of saplings develops to close future canopy gaps as they occur.

The Sika Foundation have based their proposal on the findings of that work to improve forest condition.

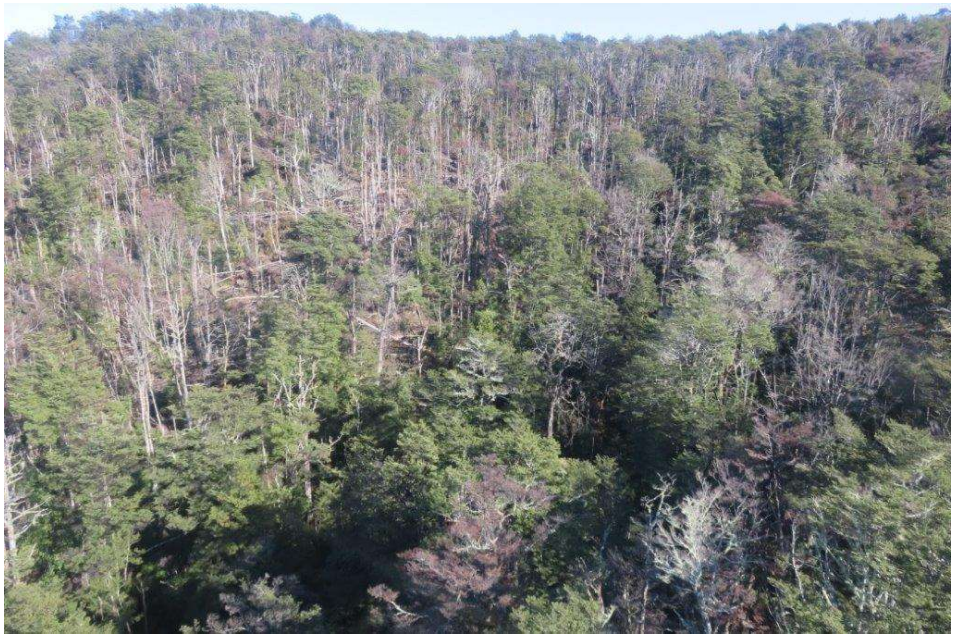


Image 2. Example of canopy dieback currently occurring in Kaimanawa Forst Park. Photo: Supplied.

Current deer management work

The Sika Foundation, through a Jobs for Nature project and support from the DOC Wild Animal Management team, has developed their capacity and tested the effectiveness of aerial and ground control operations in the Kaimanawa Remote Experience Zone. Aerial control has been shown to be the most effective, with almost 1,100 deer being removed in the last three years.

DOC is also supporting the Sika Foundation by providing design, training and tools for vegetation and deer monitoring work across the parks. Monitoring is currently underway assess the abundance and impacts of sika across parts of both the Kaimanawa and Kaweka Forest Parks.

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