



South Westland District Tahr Management Plan 2022/23

SIGNED by:

Operations Manager South Westland
On behalf of the Department of Conservation

SIGNED by:

Chairperson
On behalf of the Tahr Foundation

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1.1 Executive Summary

The New Zealand Tahr Foundation (NZTF) and the Department of Conservation (DOC) entered into a 3-year Community Agreement in February 2022 (DOCCM-6920217). As a requirement of the Community Agreement the NZTF will consult with DOC South Westland District staff and provide to the Director General an annual work plan for activities under the Community Agreement. NZTF and DOC representatives met in Haast on September 7, 2022, to discuss the results of a successful NZTF-led tahr population management trial in the Makawhio / Jacobs valley in March 2022 and to discuss a plan for the year ahead. This year's plan is to target areas where tahr population management is further required in the Makawhio / Jacobs Valley, and to extend NZTF-led tahr population management to a single site at the lower Mahitahi ballot camp site and the Troyte catchment of the Karangarua, in Westland National Park.

1.2 Background

The New Zealand Tahr Foundation (NZTF) is a not-for profit organisation established in 2016 with the purposes: education, co-ordination among stakeholders, to manage Himalayan Tahr and acquire "Herd of special interest" (HOSI) status for the Tahr herd via the Game Animal Council Act 2013. A "HOSI" designation enables the management of game animal populations, subject to adequate environmental protection, for the purposes of hunting. However, the NZTF's key undertaking since 2018 has been to minimise the adverse impacts on the hunting sector of DOC's Tahr population reduction efforts, by advocating for effort to be directed and coordinated so that cultural and recreational values are maintained as far as possible. To achieve this goal and to reduce pressures on biodiversity, as outlined by the Te Mana o te Taiao Aotearoa Biodiversity Strategy 2020, effective tahr population management tools must be applied based on landscape attributes, animal behaviors and resource values at place.

A significant number of tahr have been removed from the feral range and exclusion zones over the past 2-3 years as a result of a directive of the Minister of Conservation to reduce tahr numbers closer to the intervention densities outlined in the "Himalayan Thar Control Plan 1993" (HTCP). However, this has largely been undertaken by helicopter search & destroy which is can have limited effectiveness in scrub and bush areas, a significant component of tahr habitat in South Westland.

Furthermore, sustained long term helicopter pressure from Search & Destroy, Aerial Assisted Trophy Hunting & Commercial carcass recovery & live capture may increase tahr occupation of bush & scrub habitat, increasing the tahr impacts on biodiversity in these areas. It is apparent that management of tahr populations to reduce impacts on bush, scrub & fringe alpine vegetation requires ground-based hunting effort.

In January 2021, the NZTF identified pockets within the HTCP Management Unit 6 - Landsborough, specifically the Makawhio / Jacobs Valley, West Coast, where tahr browse impacts to thick vegetation and high female tahr densities were observable. The NZTF undertook a successful female tahr population management operation, “targeted harvest trial,” during March 2022.

This plan aims to build on the successful “targeted harvest trial” to further evaluate the potential for sustained hunter-led tahr population management in the Makawhio / Jacobs Valley and other recreationally important valleys within the South Westland district to pursue both biodiversity and hunter interest objectives.

1.3 Core activities planned for 2022/23

Ground-based hunts of 3-5 days will be undertaken at each of the sites listed below. Nanny group sizes and distribution will be recorded, and vegetation status subjectively assessed at each site. Tahr populations observed this year will help inform whether further population management is required in the year following at sites.

Makawhio /JACOBS (map - Appendix 1)

One operation at each site (upper and lower landing sites). The lower site is a challenging place to hunt, minimising scent dispersal is important for success. The upper site is less challenging to hunt but covers a much larger area, suitable for more hunters. Timing: late October/early November when tahr are out actively feeding down low (pre-kid). March as an alternative, subject to hunter availability and weather.

- o Upper site – 3 hunters (1 helicopter load).
- o Lower site – 2 hunters (1 helicopter load).

MAHITAHİ (map Appendix 2)

One operation initially as an exploration. If numbers warrant a second visit this may be undertaken as a follow up. Timing: late October/early November simultaneous with the Jacobs. March as an alternative, subject to hunter availability and weather or for a follow up if required.

- o Lower site – 2 hunters (1 helicopter load).

TROYTE (map - Appendix 3)

One operation initially as an exploration. The valley was previously identified as a bull stronghold and an important recreational hunting area, but nanny populations have increased displacing bulls.

Timing: March to provide enough time to for planning and permissions.

- o Single site – 3 hunters (1 helicopter load).

1.3.2 Management Targets

As per the NZTF Standard Operating Procedures only identifiable nannies are to be shot. To achieve the management targets experienced hunters will make up at least 2 of each 3-person party. 2-person parties will be experienced hunters only.

Seasonal milestones:

- Reduce adult female tahr populations in the Makawhio valley (lower site only) and Mahitahi valley as far as possible due to the bush clad environment and difficulty hunting these areas.
- Reduce adult female tahr populations in the Troyte valley as far as possible due to the National Park land status.
- Reduce adult female tahr group sizes to five or fewer in the Makawhio valley (upper site only) to reduce impacts from large groups while maintaining recreational values.

Note: the window for spring management in November is short due to oncoming kid drop by nannies, because it is inhumane to shoot nannies once kids have dropped as the kids would starve. November can also be subject to wet spring weather, though the seasons are unpredictable. Seasonal milestones are to be met by the end of March leaving April free for hunters and tahr time to settle before the rut ballots begin and commercial activities are permitted.

Ground-based management criteria 2022/23

- Mature nannies only to be shot
- Good shot placement
- Non-toxic (lead free) ammunition to be used
- Track logs to be recorded during hunting or drawn on map after each hunt should equipment failure occur.
- Record locations and numbers of tahr harvested onto the NZTF App or GPS
- Photograph kills able to be accessed without risk or significant time wasting
- Record numbers and approx. age /sex of observed of non-target animals
- Vegetation assessments to be conducted using the NZTF App or Camera.
- Hunters are encouraged to salvage meat where possible and sensible and where it does not impact significantly on hunting efficiency.

1.3.3 Tahr / Vegetation Monitoring Activities

Vegetation monitoring in both alpine and forest habitats is the responsibility of DOC. However, the NZTF hunters on site for management operations will take notes and photographs of vegetation status and establish and record any agreed photo monitoring points. Further collaboration between NZTF and DOC for improved environmental monitoring is anticipated.

(DOC will make available any relevant vegetation or tahr monitoring results to NZTF)

Photo point monitoring

Objective: Establish fixed sites and direction in selected locations within operational areas to monitor vegetation response to management activities.

Outcomes: Data and images gathered to be made available to NZTF membership and DOC South Westland District Staff. Analysis of this information may be used to help develop future annual work plans under the Community Agreement.

1.3.4 Kea Conservation Trust

As part of the ongoing collaboration between the NZTF, the Kea Conservation Trust and the Game Animal Council, hunters operating under this plan will be required to record kea observations on the NZTF App or via surveys provided by DOC. The Project manager will pass data to the Kea Conservation Trust and DOC following the end of year review.

1.4 Publicity

The NZTF will from time to time gather material from activities associated with this work plan in the form of still and motion pictures to promote the relationship between the NZTF and DOC, and encourage recreational hunters to become engaged with tahr management.

Specific details of individual animals and locations will not be made available but reports and more general findings may be made public from time to time.

Where publicity relevant to management activities within the context of this plan mentions DOC specifically, an opportunity to provide comment on publications prior to release will be afforded to DOC. Equally, an opportunity to provide comment will be afforded to the NZTF for any publicity to be released by DOC relevant to management activities within the context of this plan.

1.5 Health & Safety

All hunters will be given a health and safety briefing before departure as per the Community Agreement DOC approved Health & Safety plan. Once on site the team will have a toolbox talk to identify and discuss any on site issues identified. In addition, hunters will abide by the following:

- Each hunter will be required to carry a 1st aid kit and each party hold a more comprehensive 1st aid kit at the tent base camp.
- Each morning the teams will confirm where they are going to hunt and expected routes of travel and return.
- Each hunter will be required to carry either a Personal Locator beacon or an In-Reach device.

- Each party will have at least 1 in- Reach device so they can communicate with the NZTF Operational Lead as required or pilot directly if necessary.
- Each hunter will be required to wear at least one hi-vis piece of clothing when hunting and away from camp.
- Immediately after returning from each trip hunters are required to report to the NZTF Operational Lead, confirm their safe return and report any incidents.
- The Operational Lead will then advise DOC that everyone has safely returned or of any incidents.

1.6 Annual Work Plan Approvals

The Community Agreement between DOC and NZTF is made pursuant to section 53(2) (i) of the Conservation Act 1987 and grants approval for NZTF to undertake a Community Group Animal Management Programme; using experienced recreational ground hunters, to manage the environmental impacts of tahr through the removal of excessive numbers of adult nannies.

Schedule 1 of the agreement required NZTF to submit an annual plan for approval (sect. B) and if approved an approval for a specific helicopter operator to undertake to drop off and pick up flights (sect. A) in areas where helicopter landings are not normally permitted (e.g. Wilderness Areas).

This annual work plan shall be approved by the Department of Conservation and may include conditions or restrictions on activities and, monitoring and recording.

This Plan provides details of the program's key operational objectives, methods and outcomes.

1.6.1 Project Management

Project team for this annual work plan for the NZTF:

- s.9(2)(a) Operational Lead
- s.9(2)(a), Hunter Liaison
- s.9(2)(a) Project Manager

Key contacts for this annual work plan within DOC:

- Gary Scott, Supervisor, South Westland District
- Wayne Costello, Operations Manager, South Westland District
- Tom Brookman, Programme Lead, Tahr

1.6.2 Plan Objectives

The primary aim of this work plan is to facilitate hunter-led management of tahr populations in areas with high recreational value and where aerial control of tahr is ineffective or detrimental, or / and unacceptable tahr impacts are observable and tahr populations are considered too high.

This annual work plan reflects the requirements of the Community Agreement and is the first formal plan prepared for tahr population management within localised areas with the aim to reduce pressures on biodiversity and support a sustainable hunting resource.

1.6.3 Methods

Ground-based hunting using experienced hunters, tent or fly camping from established sites using non-toxic ammunition

Positioning flights will be made at the direction of the Project Manager using the approved DOC Helicopter operator following approval by DOC.

Tahr will be targeted primarily in forest, scrub slips and open creek bed zones, and recovery of meat will be undertaken where practical.

Photographs of shot animals taken where possible but this will be only where it is safe to do so and not detrimental to shooting more animals (i.e. time wasting or scenting up areas).

Locations of all animals seen & shot will be recorded on the NZTF App, either in real time or in the evening upon returning to camp using GPS points, whichever matches the hunters' technical skills and equipment.

1.6.4 Outcomes

The average number of nannies shot per hunter hour will be used as a means of monitoring progress along with comparison of previous years efforts and observations. Ideally the number of nannies shot will initially be high, reducing at each site following recurrent management operations and then stabilise. Indications of a positive vegetation response would also be ideal, though this may take several years to become apparent due to the slow growth of some species.

As this programme becomes more established, measuring change in browse impacts of established vegetation monitoring sites could be used to assess whether the aim of reducing pressure on biodiversity is being achieved or not. Similarly, monitoring recreational and commercial hunter harvest, e.g. quality and quantity of bulls, could be used to assess whether the aim of maintaining recreational values is being achieved or not.

Field records and observations collected will be included within the annual report aimed to be submitted to DOC South Westland District Office by the end of July 2023.

1.6.5 End of year review

Results will be reviewed in a report aimed to be prepared by July 31, 2023. The report will cover:

- Seasonal weather conditions during each cull
- Hunter effort
- Changes in the number of tahr shot per hour from previous year (Jacobs)
- The number and location of nannies taken during the cull
- Numbers of tahr observed but not shot (sex, approx. age, group size)
- Non-target animals observed
- Vegetation observations and any relevant photographs
- Kea observations
- Other biodiversity Observations

Recreational Hunting

Objective: Continue to provide quality recreational tahr hunting opportunities in New Zealand mountains.

- Encourage recreational hunters to hunt tahr and contribute to population management using best practice guidelines.
- Encourage recreational hunters to complete kill/observation returns via the Tahr Foundation App to collate a record of all tahr harvested (as far as possible) and monitor tahr population trends. These figures will be considered in the development of future tahr management activities.
- Support improved management of the annual Tahr Wilderness Ballot for maximising the benefits it provides to both biodiversity and recreational hunting values.

None of the areas to be hunted in this plan are proposed to be closed to hunting permits, as apart from the Troyte, it is accepted they are largely inaccessible outside of the Wilderness access ballot.

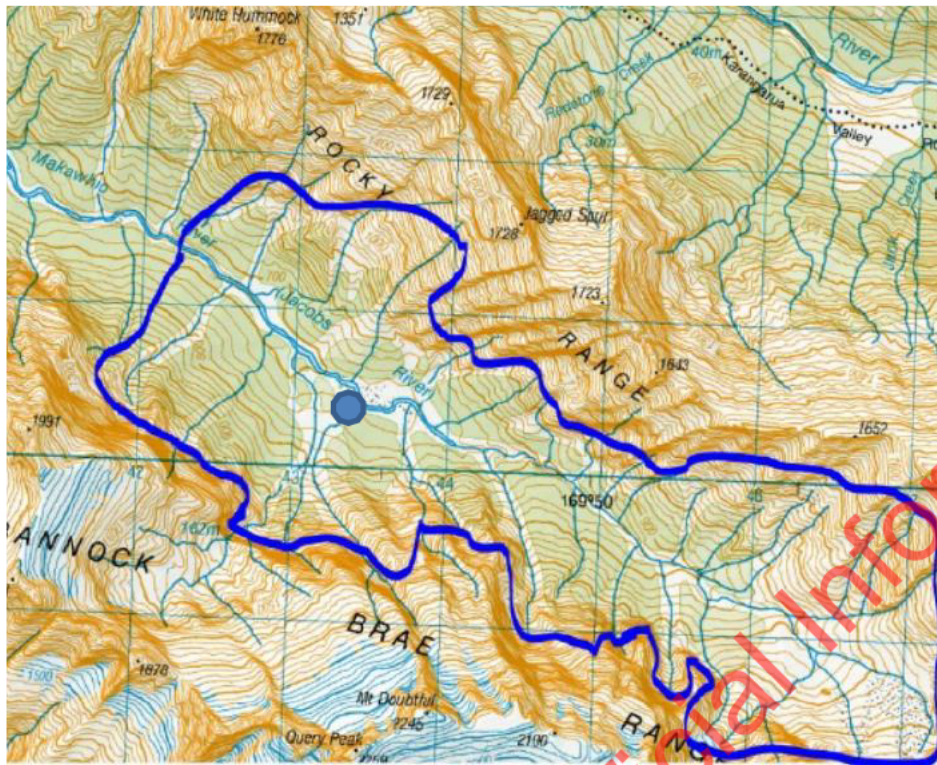
Note: The Karangarua is an important recreational hunting area as Christmas Flat has helicopter access (one of only 2 in Westland National Park). As the Troyte is accessible, albeit with some difficulty, from the Karangarua we suggest a notice of the operation is put in the Christmas Flat hut, that the operation is notified through hunting permits applied for within 3 months of the management activity. Also, that the DOC contact person advises V.C. staff at Franz and Fox in case of

hunter enquiry. DOC contact to also consider a temporary notice on the DOC's web site, hunter information for the Karangarua.

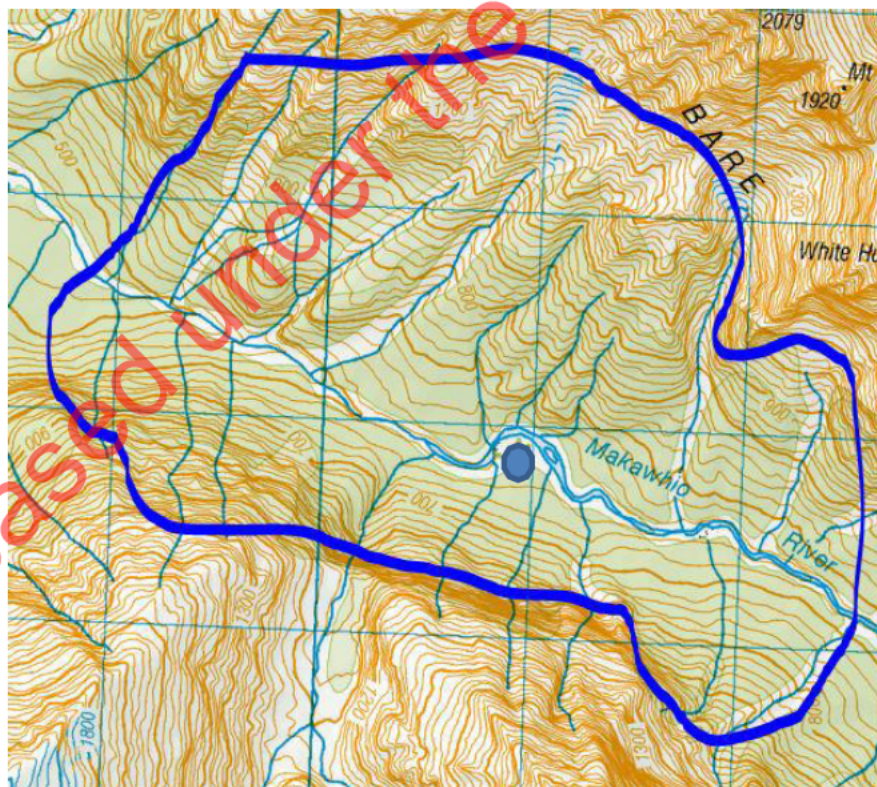
1.7 Documentation quoted

- Annual planning meeting notes of the NZTF & DOC (Haast) 7/9/2022
- Community Agreement 24 February 2022 between the New Zealand Tahr Foundation and the Director General of Conservation (DOC)
- Himalayan Thar Control Plan 1993
- NZTF Health and Safety Plan Approved by DOC
- NZTF Target Harvest Trial Report 2022
- NZTF Standard Operation Procedures
- Te Mana o te Taiao Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020

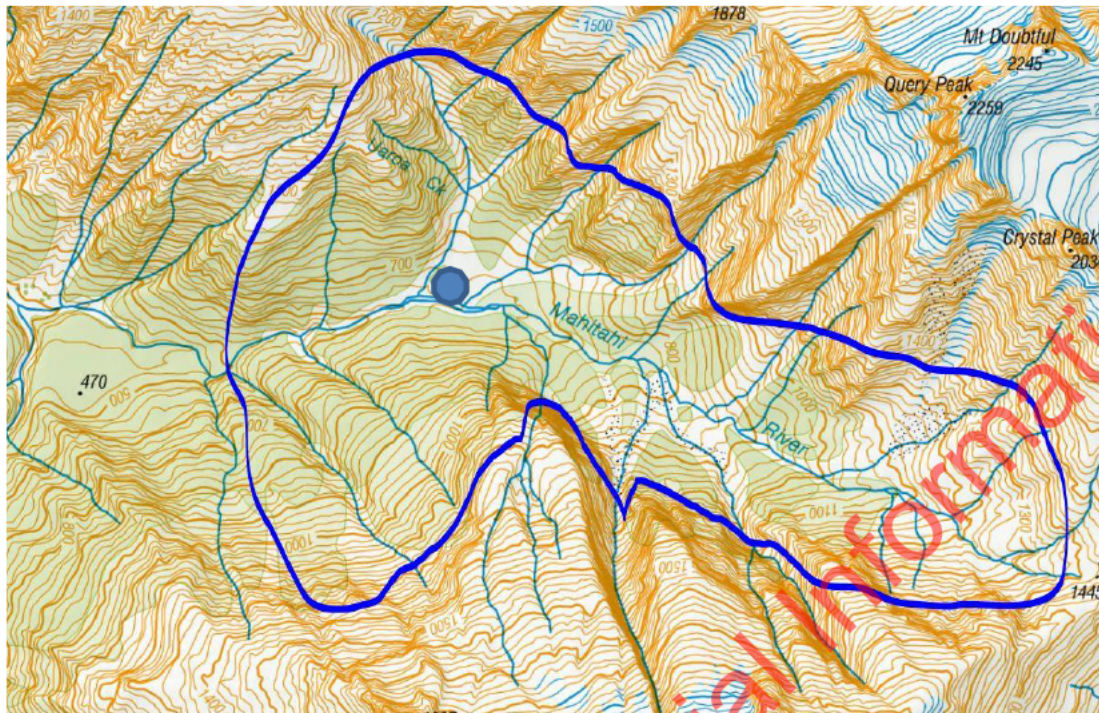
A.1 Maps of proposed managed areas and landing sites – Makawhio / Jacobs Valley MU6 – Upper site



A.2 Maps of proposed managed areas and landing sites – Makawhio / Jacobs Valley MU6 – Lower site



A.3 Maps of proposed managed areas and landing sites – Mahitahi Valley MU6



A.4 Maps of proposed managed areas and estimated landing site – Troyte Valley MU4a

