



NZTF South Westland District Tahr Management Plan 2023/24

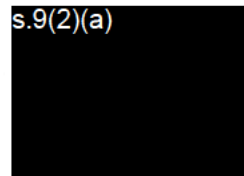
SIGNED by:

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Operations Manager South Westland
On behalf of the Department of Conservation

SIGNED by:

s.9(2)(a)



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 Tahr Management Plan (TMP). NZTF and DOC representatives met in Franz Josef on November 7, 2023, to discuss the results of a successful NZTF-led tahr population management work in the Mahitahi & Makawhio / Jacobs valley in February & March 2023 and to discuss a plan for the year ahead, acknowledging it was now too late for spring hunts to occur this year. This seasons plan is to revisit areas for NZTF-led tahr population management where further tahr work is required in the Mahitahi and Makawhio / Jacobs Valleys and to extend to a single site in the Troyte catchment of the Karangarua, in Westland National Park if time and conditions permit.

1.2 Background

The New Zealand Tahr Foundation (NZTF) is a not-for profit organization 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 minimize 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 2-4 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 not effective 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 and again in March 2023. In addition, the trial was extended to the upper Mahitahi valley in late February 2023.

This plan aims to build on the successful “targeted harvest trial” establishing sustained hunter-led tahr population management in the upper regions of the Makawhio / Jacobs and Mahitahi Valleys within the South Westland district to pursue both biodiversity and hunter interest objective.

1.3 Core activities planned for 2023/24

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

MAHITAHİ (map - A3)

One 3-4 day operation as a first priority as observations indicate the lower tahr numbers and vegetation impacts suggest a quicker recovery to vegetation and trophy quality may be achievable in this valley with hunter-led population management. As there is quite a lot of bush to hunt a 3 person party is recommended. Timing: March, subject to volunteer availability and weather.

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

Makawhio /JACOBS (map - A1 & A2)

One 3-4 day operation at each site (upper and lower landing sites). The lower site is a more challenging place to hunt, due to the amount of bush cover. The upper site is less challenging to observe and engage animals but covers a much larger area and thus potentially suitable for more hunters. Timing: late Feb to late March, subject to volunteer availability and weather.

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

TROYTE (map - A4)

One operation initially as an exploration. The valley was previously identified as a bull stronghold and an important recreational hunting area, albeit difficult to access, but nanny populations have increased. This was planned for March 2023, however ground work by NZTF was deferred due to commercial recovery interest. Timing: March noting permission is required for this work in WNP.

- o Single site – 3 hunters (1 helicopter load). Suggested 2-3 days.

1.3.2 Management Targets

As per the NZTF Standard Operating Procedures it is preferred that only identifiable nannies and very small Kids unlikely to survive or thrive 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 / Jacobs valley (as per A1 & A2 maps) and Mahitahi valley (as per A3 Map) as far as possible, acknowledging the bush clad environment and difficulty hunting these areas.
- Reduce adult female tahr populations in the Troyte valley to encourage improved bull habitat to support local recreational hunting values.
- Reduce adult female tahr group sizes to five in the Makawhio / Jacobs valley (upper site only) to reduce impacts from large groups and to maintain recreational values.

Note: the window for late summer - autumn management is short. Seasonal milestones are to be met by the end of March leaving April free for hunters and residual tahr populations time to settle before the rut ballots begin and commercial activities are permitted.

Ground-based management criteria 2023/24

- Mature nannies and very late born/small kids only to be shot
- Good shot placement
- Only 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.
- Volunteers 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 annually)

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, and tahr programme) Staff. Analysis of this information used to help develop future tahr management plans.

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 management 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 volunteers 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 volunteers 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 Animal Management 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).

This Tahr Management 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 Tahr Management Plan for the NZTF:

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

Key contacts for this Tahr Management Plan within DOC South Westland District Office:

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

1.6.2 Plan Objectives

The primary aim of this 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 Tahr Management Plan reflects the requirements of the Community Agreement and is the first formal plan prepared for tahr population management within localized 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 with predominantly .223 rifles. Larger calibers with copper projectiles may also be used for any identified sites requiring longer range shooting.

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, but also at bush / scrub margins with alpine vegetation. Some recovery of meat will be undertaken where practical.

Photographs of shot animals will be 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, with age of oldest animals noted, 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 reduce at each site following recurrent management operations and then stabilize. Indications of a positive vegetation response would also be ideal, though this may take several years to become apparent due to the slow recovery and growth of some preferred 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 seen &/or harvested, 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 August 2024.

1.6.5 End of year review

Results will be reviewed in a report aimed to be prepared for NZTF committee review by July 31 2024. 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 and Mahitahi)
- 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 & Whio observations
- Other biodiversity Observations

1.6.6 Recreational Hunting

Objective: Continue to provide quality recreational tahr hunting opportunities in New Zealand mountains as it has no equal in the world.

- 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.

Method: Recreational hunting permits for the annual Tahr Wilderness Ballot are issued by DOC. However, the NZTF has expressed an interest in supporting the ballots improved management for recreational and biodiversity benefits, specifically by being involved in the decisions on use of net revenue, minimising operating costs to increase net revenue and maximising the value of the tahr resource for increased and sustained net revenue.

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 recreational helicopter access (one of only 2 currently approved in the Westland National Park management plan). 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, and that the operation is notified through DOC's Permitting web site under hunter information for the Karangarua valley. Also, that the DOC contact person advises local helicopter operators and V.C. staff at Franz and Fox in case of hunter enquiry.

1.6.7 Funding

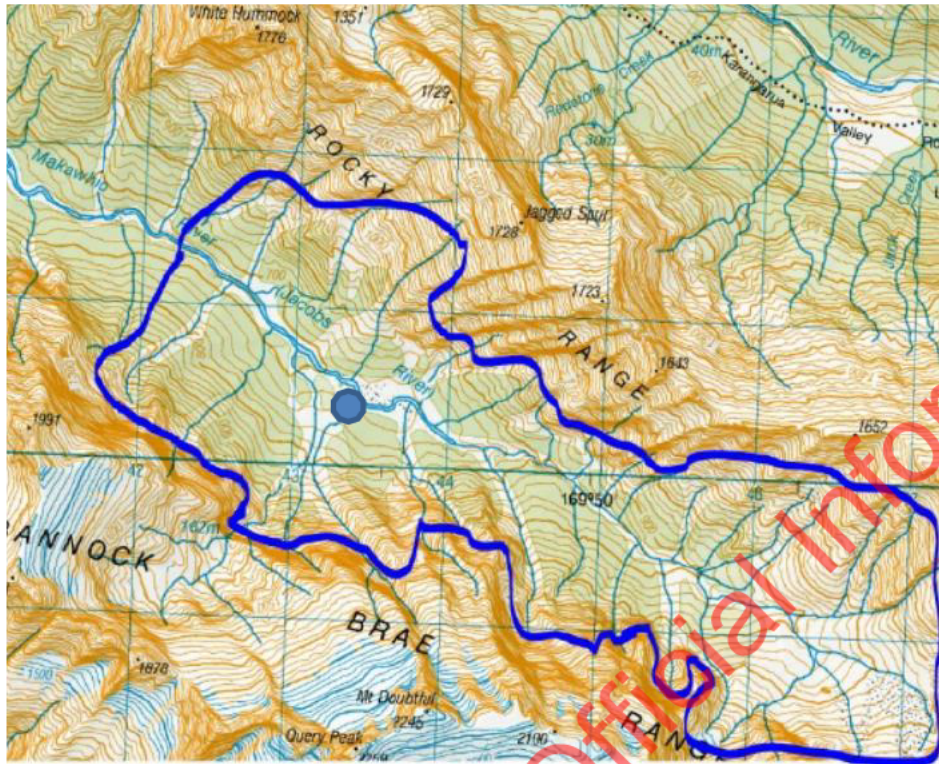
As discussed at the Annual Planning meeting in Franz Josef, funding has been an issue for the NZTF to undertake these management hunts, due in part to restrictions under its existing constitution. Until the constitution is amended and approved and more reliable funding sources can be obtained it is proposed to seek some funding for the work outlined in this plan from a) the Hunter Conservation Trust and b) from the revenue D.O.C. South Westland gets from the Annual Tahr Wilderness Area hunting Ballot.

An application will be submitted to the D.O.C. South Westland Operations manager outlining this after contacting the Hunter Conservation Trust by 31st January 2024

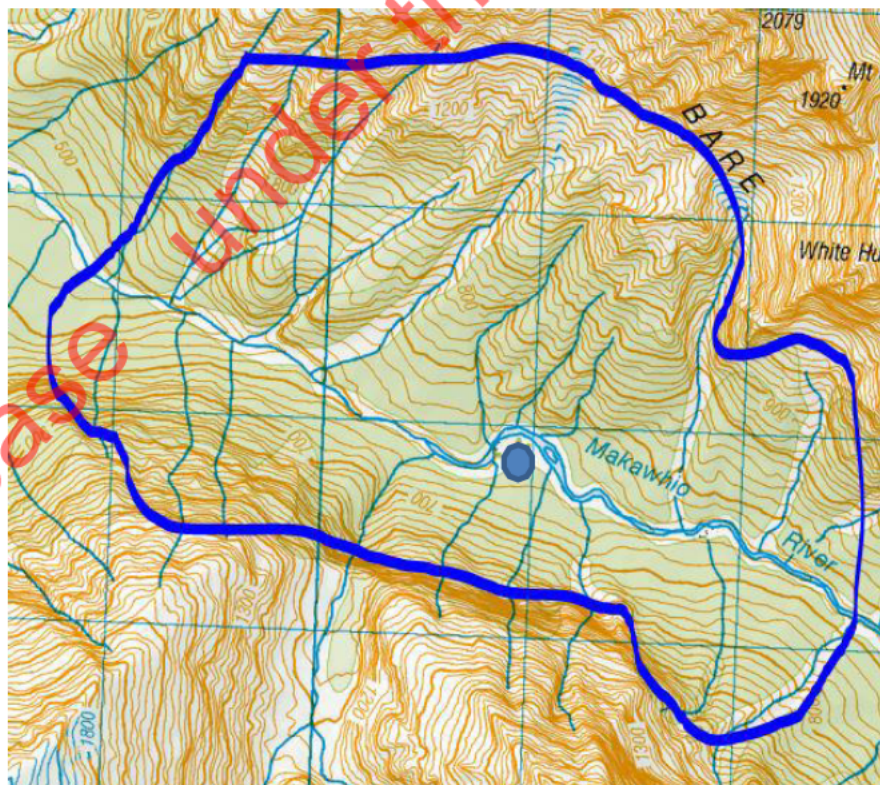
1.6.8 Documentation quoted

- Annual planning meeting notes of the NZTF & DOC (Franz Josef) 7/11/2023
- 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 2023
- NZTF Standard Operation Procedures
- Te Mana o te Taiao Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020

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



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



Official Information Act

Query Peak 2259

Crystal Peak 2034

Mehitarhi River

1445



Official

