

2026

Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest

Herd Management Plan



**New Zealand
Government**
Te Kāwanatanga
o Aotearoa

Cover: Wapiti Area. *Photo: Department of Conservation*

Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest Herd Management Plan

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ISBN: 978-1-0671400-4-5

Published by:

Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai
PO Box 10420, Wellington 6140
New Zealand



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Foreword

Welcome to the Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest Herd Management Plan.

This is the first herd management plan made in accordance with the Game Animal Council Act 2013. It relates only to the management of Fiordland wapiti and the designation of these animals as a herd of special interest within the Wapiti Area in Fiordland National Park.

The Plan seeks to recognise the outstanding universal values of Fiordland National Park, the World Heritage Area status of Te Wāhipounamu – South West New Zealand, and the unique place Fiordland wapiti have come to have within the park. In doing so, the Plan attempts to balance the critically important task of conserving New Zealand's most precious wild spaces in their natural state with the day-to-day realities of conservation and the management of wild deer, while also recognising Fiordland wapiti are highly valued by hunters.

The Plan acknowledges the connection that Treaty partners and iwi Māori have to the area and seeks to recognise the significance of Fiordland National Park to all New Zealanders.

This plan represents the culmination of decades of effort by individuals and organisations, particularly the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation, and more recently the New Zealand Game Animal Council. The Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai has also played a role, including undertaking on my behalf the process to develop this plan.

A draft of the Plan was publicly notified, with the submissions period running from 10 November 2025 until 8 December 2025. I wish to thank the 352 individuals and organisations that took the time to consider the draft and lodge submissions. Those submissions were carefully considered and have been reflected in this plan, as appropriate. It is significantly improved and strengthened as a result of that engagement.

I expect there to be a range of benefits gained from managing Fiordland wapiti for hunting purposes. These are set out in Appendix 2, and in my notice designating the herd. However, I wish to note that of particular importance are the benefits of improved ecological outcomes for indigenous species and ecosystems through population management, regular monitoring, and responsible harvest decision-making by the hunting community.

Similarly, I expect there to be a range of benefits for hunters, particularly in the enhancement of an already high-quality and highly sought-after hunting experience, where they enjoy a unique wilderness challenge.

It is my hope that there will also be a range of benefits for iwi, hapū and local communities. These include opportunities for Papatipu Rūnanga to be involved in Fiordland wapiti management activities and for the hunting community to be empowered and actively involved in the management of Fiordland wapiti. I anticipate that this will foster a sense of responsibility and stewardship among the hunting community and promote connections to the cultural and natural heritage of the Wapiti Area. Hunters will be encouraged to increasingly contributing to conservation efforts, such as chamois and deer control, environmental monitoring, maintenance of recreation facilities, and predator control initiatives.

I expect that managing Fiordland wapiti for hunting purposes will also lead to sustainable non-government, user-pays funding for the management of the Wapiti Area and have economic and social benefits for local communities. In this respect, I anticipate commercial benefits associated with hunter tourism, social benefits arising from the hunting community supporting local initiatives, and the retention of specialist expertise and capability in wild deer management, control, recovery and monitoring activities through ongoing management.

Wapiti management will continue to evolve and strengthen over time, as this plan informs management and enables increasingly evidence-led decision-making.

I now approve this plan as providing direction for management of the Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest over the next five years.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large loop followed by a horizontal line and a small flourish.

Hon James Meager
Minister for Hunting and Fishing
13 July 2026

1 Introduction

On 13 July 2026, the Minister for Hunting and Fishing announced designation of the Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest, in accordance with section 16 of the Game Animal Council Act 2013. The designation provides statutory recognition that Fiordland wapiti (*Cervus canadensis* x *Cervus elaphus*) in part of Fiordland National Park are of special interest to hunters and provides for these animals to be managed for hunting purposes while ensuring conservation values continue to be protected.

The Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest Herd Management Plan (the Plan) has been prepared in accordance with section 19 of the Game Animal Council Act, as part of the process to designate the Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest.

The designation of the Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest, and development of this plan, are not about protecting wapiti or managing them in the same way as indigenous species. The designation means Fiordland wapiti within the Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest Area (the Wapiti Area) will be managed as 'game animals' under the Game Animal Council Act, rather than as 'wild animals' under the Wild Animal Control Act 1977. This change recognises the value of the herd, and emphasises proactive and sustainable herd management to achieve conservation, hunting, community and economic benefits.

Purpose of this plan

The Plan establishes objectives and strategies for the management of wapiti in the Wapiti Area. It aims to achieve the benefits expected to be gained by managing this herd for hunting purposes, as provided for under section 16(3)(e) of the Game Animal Council Act and as required by section 19(3) of that Act.

It reflects and sets out the values associated with the Fiordland wapiti herd, as recognised by the designation of Fiordland Wapiti as a Herd of Special Interest.

This plan applies to all species of deer in the genus *Cervus* that occur in the Wapiti Area in Fiordland National Park, see Map 1 in Appendix 1. These animals are collectively referred to as 'Fiordland wapiti'.

The Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest designation and this plan apply only to Fiordland wapiti and their management within the Fiordland Wapiti Area.

The Plan provides a high-level framework of objectives and strategies. Detailed operational matters will be set out in supporting operational plans developed as part of the implementation and delivery of the Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest. These operational plans are intended to be adaptive and updated over time in response to monitoring results and management needs.

Application of the Plan and statutory context

This plan takes effect from the date hunting conditions for the Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest are first posted in the *New Zealand Gazette*. It continues to apply unless the designation is revoked.

In accordance with section 19(8) of the Game Animal Council Act, this plan 'does not restrict or affect the exercise of a legal right or power by any person unless that person agrees to be bound'.

The Game Animal Council Act is listed in Schedule 1 of the Conservation Act 1987. This means that the Game Animal Council Act must be so interpreted and administered as to give effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi.¹ The designation and Plan do not override relevant provisions of the Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act 1998.

See the Glossary for explanations of terms used.

Overriding considerations

This plan has been prepared to be consistent with the overriding considerations identified in the Game Animal Council Act. The relevant considerations are the:

- welfare and management of public conservation land and resources generally
- *General Policy for National Parks 2005*²
- *Southland Murihiku Conservation Management Strategy 2016*³
- *Fiordland National Park Management Plan 2007*⁴
- pest management strategies and plans made under the Biosecurity Act 1993.

Key parties and relationships relevant to this plan

Minister for Hunting and Fishing

The Minister for Hunting and Fishing is the responsible Minister for the Game Animal Council Act. The Act provides the Minister with powers to designate herds of special interest, to develop a related herd management plan, and to manage those herds in accordance with the Act.

The Minister for Hunting and Fishing has exercised these powers in the making of this plan and designation of the Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest.

The Minister for Hunting and Fishing may delegate their herd of special interest management powers under the Game Animal Council Act to the New Zealand Game Animal Council (the Game Animal Council), in accordance with section 20 of the Act. The Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai (the Department) may also carry out functions on behalf of the Minister for Hunting and Fishing.

Ngāi Tahu

Ngāi Tahu are the tangata whenua with rangatiratanga or mana whenua (tribal authority) over the area covered by this plan. Ngāi Tahu are the Crown's Treaty partner under the Treaty of Waitangi. This plan acknowledges the Crown's obligations to give effect to the principles of the Treaty, as set out in section 4 of the Conservation Act, along with its obligations under the Ngāi Tahu Deed of Settlement 1997, Ngāi Tahu (Pounamu Vesting) Act 1997 and Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act 1998.

¹ Conservation Act 1987, section 4.

² New Zealand Conservation Authority. 2005. *General Policy for National Parks 2005*. Wellington: Department of Conservation (doc.govt.nz/national-park-policy).

³ Department of Conservation. 2016. *Southland Murihiku Conservation Management Strategy 2016*. Wellington: Department of Conservation (doc.govt.nz/southlandcms).

⁴ Department of Conservation. 2007. *Fiordland National Park Management Plan 2007*. Invercargill: Department of Conservation (doc.govt.nz/fnp-management-plan).

The relationship between Ngāi Tahu and the Minister of Conservation is the primary relationship with respect to the management of Fiordland National Park. This plan is subject to the protocols required under section 282 of the Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act.⁵

Lake Te Anau (Te Ana-au), which forms part of the eastern boundary of the Wapiti Area, is a Deed of Recognition site acknowledged by the Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act 1998.⁶ Many bird and plant species that are recognised as taonga (treasures) to Ngāi Tahu can be found within the Wapiti Area.⁷

The Wapiti Area is within the takiwā (region) of the four Papatipu Rūnanga (Rūnaka) of Murihiku (Southland), which include:

- Ōraka–Aparima Rūnaka
- Hokonui Rūnanga
- Waihōpai Rūnaka
- Te Rūnaka o Awarua.

References to Papatipu Rūnanga in this plan refer to these four rūnanga.

New Zealand Game Animal Council

The Game Animal Council is a statutory entity established under the Game Animal Council Act.

This council has various functions in relation to game animals, which include deer, tahr, chamois and wild pigs. These functions include:

- advising and making recommendations to the Minister for Hunting and Fishing
- raising awareness of the views of the hunting sector
- providing information and education
- promoting codes of conduct and operating certification schemes
- liaising with hunters, representatives of tangata whenua and organisations to improve hunting opportunities.

The Game Animal Council is expected to work collaboratively with the Department and Fiordland Wapiti Foundation to support implementation of this plan, consistent with their respective roles.

The Game Animal Council also has a statutory function to assess the costs of managing herds of special interest and to make recommendations to the Minister of Hunting and Fishing on cost recovery.

Fiordland Wapiti Foundation

The Fiordland Wapiti Foundation is an incorporated society established in 1993. It undertakes various management, community and conservation initiatives relating to wapiti in the Wapiti Area and wider Fiordland National Park.

⁵ As found on the Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu website (ngaitahu.iwi.nz) and in Appendix 13 of the *Southland Murihiku Conservation Management Strategy 2016* (doc.govt.nz/southlandcms).

⁶ Deed of Settlement between Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu and Her Majesty the Queen, 22 October 1998, Section 12: Mahinga Kai, Attachment 12.111 (govt.nz/assets/Documents/OTS/Ngai-Tahu/Ngai-Tahu-Deed-of-Settlement-Section-12-Mahinga-kai-general-21-Nov-1997.pdf).

⁷ Taonga species as in Schedule 97 and Schedule 98 of the Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act 1998.

Since 2005, the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation has undertaken an animal management programme in the Wapiti Area, working closely with the Department via a community agreement with the Director-General under section 53 of the Conservation Act. The Foundation's work has included managing the removal of around 900 to 1,100 deer from the Wapiti Area annually and managing recreational hunting in the Wapiti Area during particular times, such as the bugle.

The Fiordland Wapiti Foundation also undertakes a variety of predator trapping work, bird surveys, and facility maintenance and upkeep in the Wapiti Area as part of a community agreement.

In early 2025, the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation proposed that the Minister for Hunting and Fishing initiate a process to consider designating Fiordland wapiti as a herd of special interest under the Game Animal Council Act. The Fiordland Wapiti Foundation will have an important role in many aspects of the day-to-day implementation and delivery of this plan. It will work collaboratively with the Game Animal Council and the Department, consistent with statutory roles and any delegation arrangements.

Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai

The Department is responsible for administering conservation legislation, including the Conservation Act, National Parks Act and the Wild Animal Control Act. It has a responsibility to promote conservation of New Zealand's natural and historic heritage resources, foster recreation and allow tourism. The Department also has a responsibility under section 4 of the Conservation Act to give effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi.

On behalf of the Minister for Hunting and Fishing, the Department leads the statutory process to develop herd management plans and ensure that legislative requirements are met. The Department will support the implementation of this plan, in accordance with delegations and directions of the Minister for Hunting and Fishing.

2 Values and context

This plan requires management of the Wapiti Herd of Special Interest for hunting purposes, while maintaining and supporting conservation, cultural and community values. The associated values and related context are outlined below.

Values

Values of the Fiordland wapiti herd

The Fiordland wapiti herd is a New Zealand hunting icon of significance to many New Zealanders. It is the only wild hunting opportunity for wapiti-type deer in the Southern Hemisphere, and hunters value wapiti for producing the largest round-antler trophies of any deer species in New Zealand.

The herd offers a unique experience in a challenging, remote environment valued for its solitude, natural quiet and substantially unmodified landscapes. Interaction with the herd in this environment fosters deep connections among the hunting community with these wild spaces. The *Fiordland National Park Management Plan 2007* recognises Fiordland hunting opportunities as some of the most challenging, remote and rewarding in New Zealand. In addition, the wapiti hunting experience and trophy element are significant drivers for recreational hunters, offering a pursuit that cannot be replicated elsewhere.

Among the hunting community, management of the herd fosters cohesion, providing contributors with a sense of belonging, purpose and achievement. The shared challenge of contributing to Fiordland wapiti herd management creates an engaged and connected hunting community. The herd also provides a valuable food source of quality meat for hunters and local communities.

The Fiordland Wapiti Foundation coordinates community initiatives associated with the herd and Wapiti Area, including the provision of venison to people in need. These initiatives rely on cost-recovery mechanisms, such as wild animal recovery operations, which in turn support the recovery businesses and their supply chain.

Overall, the Fiordland wapiti herd and community-led management approach is a drawcard for thousands of domestic and international hunters each year. This generates significant economic value through hunter tourism spending and wild animal recovery operations.

Management of the herd must ensure that conservation values are maintained and, where possible, improved, having regard to the overriding considerations of the Game Animal Council Act.

Conservation values

As noted, the Wapiti Area is located within Fiordland National Park, an area treasured for its pristine and dramatic landscapes, rich indigenous biodiversity and unique flora and fauna. The *Fiordland National Park Management Plan 2007* is the statutory document that details the conservation values associated with the park, including the Wapiti Area.

The forest cover of the area includes ancient and mature southern beech and podocarps, containing unique communities of native flora that are adapted to the local climate and soil conditions. In the subalpine zone, tussock grasses and daisy species thrive, and higher in the alpine zone are herbfields.

The Wapiti Area is home to indigenous endemic birds, including pīwauwau / rock wren, whio / blue duck, mohua / yellowhead, kākā, kea, tokoeka / southern brown kiwi and tawaki / Fiordland crested penguin. It does not, however, contain any ecological management areas or units that have been identified by the Department's existing statutory management plans.

Fiordland National Park forms part of Te Wāhipounamu – South West New Zealand World Heritage Area. This UNESCO World Heritage Area designation recognises the international significance of the park's conservation (and other) values, alongside the Westland Tai Poutini, Aoraki / Mount Cook and Mount Aspiring national parks.

Conservation values are supported through active stewardship by local iwi and rūnanga, the Department, hunting groups and the wider community.

Through its management agreement with the Department, the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation has contributed to these values for over 20 years, by maintaining a low-density deer population that aims to enable the regeneration of browsed indigenous flora. Specific conservation values are also realised through predator control initiatives, such as the deployment and operation of over 500 traps, to protect native species like whio and kea. Management activities by the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation also support the Murchison Mountains Takahē Specially Protected Area through financial support and deer control.

Management will seek to maintain deer impacts within ecological limits through an adaptive management framework, informed by monitoring and consistent with the overriding considerations set out in the Game Animal Council Act.

Cultural, heritage and community values

Fiordland is central to the cultural values of the Waitaha, Ngāti Mamoe and Ngāi Tahu peoples, the mana whenua for whom Fiordland is a sacred place. The Māori history of Fiordland reaches back more than 1,000 years, and Fiordland features prominently in creation and exploration accounts of the South Island (Te Waipounamu). Early Māori were attracted by the presence of koko-takiwai (a softer type of pounamu) and kākāpō. The area was also abundant in mahinga kai (food resources), which travelling groups relied on during their expeditions in the difficult terrain. These traditions and cultural values represent treasured links between tīpuna (ancestors) and present generations.

The area is also historically significant as a site of early European exploration, exploitation and settlement. The wapiti herd is also intrinsically linked to New Zealand hunting folklore, with a history documenting early trophy notoriety and commercial exploitation.

The Wapiti Area includes the 123,800-hectare gazetted Glaisnock Wilderness Area. This area is renowned and highly valued by self-reliant and highly experienced recreationists for its substantially unmodified landscapes, solitude, natural quiet and limited recreational facilities. Similar values are also present in the Fiordland Wapiti Area outside the boundaries of the gazetted Wilderness Area.

The Wapiti Area contains a network of huts developed over many years to support hunting, recreation and park management, with some dating back over a century. These huts, located at sites such as the head of the Te Houhou / George and Taitetimu / Caswell sounds and the Glaisnock Valley, are maintained under a community agreement between the Department and Fiordland Wapiti Foundation, and are of significant historical interest.

Parts of the Wapiti Area are also a focal point for many community activities and values, including tramping, climbing, caving, fishing and boating. The area is used by outdoor education, tertiary education and school groups. Most activities other than hunting in this part of Fiordland National Park occur on the boundaries of the Wapiti Area during the summer and outside peak hunting times.

Different views are held on Fiordland wapiti and how they should be managed. Some consider Fiordland wapiti as an introduced species and think the animals should be removed. Others seek to realise the value of the herd as a part of the contemporary cultural and community context of Fiordland National Park.

This plan adopts a balanced and adaptive approach that recognises these perspectives while improving management outcomes. The Plan also recognises the importance of enabling meaningful participation of tangata whenua in management and decision-making processes.

Context

Fiordland wapiti herd

Ten wapiti bulls (males) and eight wapiti cows (females) were released into Fiordland National Park at the head of Te Houhou / George Sound in 1905. Ten of these animals, from Yellowstone National Park, were gifted to New Zealand from the United States of America by then President Theodore Roosevelt, and the remainder were purchased by the Tourism Department. The term 'wapiti' originates from a Shawnee and Cree word meaning 'white rump', referring to the distinctive pale patch on the animal's hindquarters. The wapiti released in Fiordland were initially protected to enable them to breed and establish in the area, with the first hunting licence being issued in 1923.

Red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) are also present in the Wapiti Area. It is not possible to physically separate the species within the area, and the two species interbreed. As a result, few, if any, pure-bred wapiti or red deer are present. Today, the herd largely comprises wapiti–red hybrids, with individual animals having more or fewer wapiti traits.

Wapiti hunting community and herd management

The Fiordland Wapiti Foundation leads the hunting community's involvement in the area. Since 2005, the Department has worked closely with the Foundation on an annual herd management programme in the Wapiti Area using a combination of recreational hunter effort and coordinated professional management operations. In other areas, the main method of deer removal is commercial wild animal recovery operations and/or recreational hunting.

As with the management of Fiordland wapiti, the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation's conservation and facility maintenance work has contributed to the management and preservation of conservation, recreation, cultural and heritage values associated with the Wapiti Area. This has enabled the Department to focus its resources on other priority areas.

It is important to recognise the contribution hunters can and, in particular areas, already do make to conservation. The work of the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation in the Wapiti Area reflects this. It achieves this through both management of the Fiordland wapiti population itself and wider conservation efforts, such as predator trapping and management work, hut restoration and support for the Murchison Mountains Takahē Specially Protected Area.

The favoured hunting period for Fiordland wapiti is during the bugle, or rut, when emboldened bulls are vocal to attract cows. The bugle runs from mid-March to late April, and hunting access during this time has been managed by a ballot administered by the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation for over 20 years. The ballot involves allocating hunting opportunities and hunting blocks to recreational hunters across four 10-day periods. The number of entries into the bugle ballot has far exceeded the available hunting block allocations for the past 10 years. The allocation of hunting opportunities through this system allows hunters to act as caretakers for the Wapiti Area rather than just end-use consumers. In particular, access facilitates the removal of animals through hunter harvest, with associated fees supporting wider herd management activities that promote the regeneration of indigenous flora and ecological objectives.

Hunting and managing for hunting purposes

Intensive herd management, commercial wild animal recovery operations and community-led programmes have resulted in variable suppression of the deer population over time in Fiordland National Park. While extensive commercial venison recovery significantly reduced deer numbers from the 1970s to 1990s, market conditions have been increasingly unfavourable for commercial operations since then. Resourcing for official herd management work has also been variable over time.

By contrast, the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation's herd management programme has resulted in relatively consistent levels of management activity since 2005, with operational costs routinely being covered by recreational hunters and coordinated wild animal recovery operations within the Wapiti Area.

This plan sets objectives and strategies for the management of Fiordland wapiti that are consistent with the overriding considerations outlined in section 1 and in accordance with the Game Animal Council Act. This involves focusing on improving conservation outcomes and habitat health to improve animal quality and enhance the Fiordland wapiti hunting experience. It recognises hunters can act as caretakers for the Wapiti Area (and the environment more broadly) rather than end-use consumers.

Managing the Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest for hunting purposes also enables management to focus on hunting experiences and outcomes, which include improving herd genetics via selective targeting of Fiordland wapiti that have less wapiti-like traits. Over time, this can improve herd quality and promote animal and trophy characteristics that are sought by hunters.

Adoption of the Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest management approach is intended to encourage collective and concerted action for Fiordland wapiti management and the conservation of indigenous flora and fauna in the Wapiti Area. It seeks to do this by recognising and providing for a variety of values, conservation outcomes, communities and recreational activities, and by building on recent collaborative efforts between the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation and the Department to improve Fiordland wapiti management. This is expected to expand the number of people contributing to conservation efforts more broadly. Working with hunters and other interested parties to increase understanding of the impacts Fiordland wapiti and other introduced species have on indigenous species can contribute to hunters adopting a conservation mindset when hunting.

Monitoring, research and reporting to support management

An adaptive management framework will guide implementation of this plan. This framework may include indicators, thresholds, monitoring methods and response pathways to inform annual operational planning and management review.

Monitoring will support adaptive management by informing whether management objectives are being achieved. The methods and implementation of monitoring will be detailed in supporting implementation documents. Various methods and tools are available to support monitoring, and these may be adjusted or improved over time to allow more robust and timely data collection. Any changes should consider integration with, or comparability to, previously applied monitoring protocols to support long-term reporting and trend analysis.

Research will support improved understanding of the effectiveness of management and contribute to achieving the objectives and strategies for managing wapiti for hunting purposes.

Reporting on herd management activities shows progress in meeting the objectives and strategies of this plan. This provides transparency and accountability to Treaty partners, stakeholders and members of the public who are interested in the management of the Wapiti Herd of Special Interest. Regular reporting will also inform ongoing management and support an efficient and effective plan review process.

Geographical context

Fiordland National Park was formally established in 1952, and covers over 1.2 million hectares. The Wapiti Area covers around 15 percent of Fiordland National Park's total area, or 190,700 hectares (including lakes and waterbodies). The area is bounded by Lake Te Anau (Te Ana-au) to the east and the Tasman Sea to the west, broken up by large fiords, from Te Hāpua / Sutherland Sound in the northwest to Hāwea / Bligh Sound, Te Houhou / George Sound and Taitetimu / Caswell Sound in the centre west, and Taiporoporo / Charles Sound at the southern extent.

Within the Wapiti Area, the Franklin and Stuart mountains rise nearly 2,000 metres above sea level. In contrast to these peaks – particularly in the Nitz Creek, Glaisnock River, Lugar Burn, Stillwater Creek, Doon River and Edith River catchments – are broad U-shaped valleys, with open areas of grassland breaking up large tracts of forest and wetland.

Ecological context

Throughout the Wapiti Area, the treeline is low (850 to 1,000 metres), with a discontinuous zone of scrub, tussock grasslands and sensitive alpine herbfields extending up to around 1,500 to 1,600 metres. While rock and snow predominate at higher elevations, plants can still be found in favourable niches.

Indigenous vegetation across the Wapiti Area is complex and unique, with wet mosses, liverworts, lichens and filmy ferns on the ground and tree trunks. The forest understorey includes diverse shrub species, including karamu / coprosmas, kāpuka / broadleaf, puahou / five finger and various ferns. Tawhai / silver beech and tawhairauriki / mountain beech are widespread in the canopy, and rimu, mataī, miro and tōtara can be prominent in areas near lakes and fiords.

Introduced animal species, including wapiti, can have significant and long-lasting impacts on an area. Deer browse can suppress forest regeneration, change plant communities and threaten biodiversity. Deer are selective feeders, so where they negatively affect native plant communities, species that are preferred by deer suffer more damage than those that are avoided.

Research indicates that regeneration is possible with intensive management, but this is generally slow, location specific and costly to sustain. Plant growth also depends on light and nutrient availability, so competition from deer-avoided species may slow down the recovery process, leading to long-term changes in forest composition. Biodiversity declines and changes in plant community composition can reduce ecological resilience, including resilience to the impacts of climate change.

An objective of the *Fiordland National Park Management Plan 2007* is to reduce and control introduced animals (including Fiordland wapiti) by all available means to a level that allows for the regeneration of browsed indigenous flora.

Deer management is expensive, with eradication and the maintenance of deer-free areas costing significantly more than suppression (population reduction) activities over the same area. Therefore, prioritisation is undertaken, and emphasis is placed on managing deer to protect priority areas and species.

Accordingly, herd management work by the Department in Fiordland National Park generally focuses on maintaining deer-free areas (such as Secretary Island, Coal Island and the Cleddau Valley) and continued intensive suppression to support habitat for the Takahē Recovery Programme in the Murchison Mountains.

3 Objectives and strategies

This section sets out the objectives and strategies for managing the Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest, to achieve the expected benefits.

Objectives

Objective	Description
1	Deer are managed within the Wapiti Area to enable and maintain the long-term regeneration of browsed indigenous flora. This is supported by the following targets: a) Maintain browse within 10% to 15% across three deer-sensitive alpine indicator species. Browse levels within or below this range achieve the objective. b) Demonstrate an increasing trend over time in the mean seedling ratio index for deer-preferred species, progressing toward and maintaining a positive mean value (>0.00).
2	Manage the herd and hunters to sustainably produce high-quality bulls for harvest during the bugle and enhance recreational hunting opportunities, values and experiences year-round.
3	Maintain and strengthen relationships between Papatipu Rūnanga and Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, the Department, the Game Animal Council and the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation.
4	Increase opportunities for Papatipu Rūnanga to be involved and participate in the management of Fiordland wapiti.
5	Maintain and enhance hunter involvement in the management of Fiordland wapiti and the Fiordland Wapiti Area.
6	Build or maintain sources of income, partnerships and in-kind support that assist with and advance the other objectives of this plan, and ensure it is wholly or largely self-funded.
7	Undertake monitoring and research to support adaptive management, and assess whether the objectives of this plan are being achieved.
8	Provide public reports and information on whether the Plan is achieving the objectives.

Strategies

Strategy	Description
1	Use a range of herd management activities to manage the Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest and improve the hunting experience.
General	
1.1	Set and review annual Fiordland wapiti management goals to support achieving the objectives and strategies of this plan.
1.2	Coordinate and manage herd management activities to selectively remove Fiordland wapiti in a way that: a) protects and enhances the hunting experience; b) optimises genetic selection and minimises hybridisation; and c) supports a male-biased population that optimises the quality of mature bulls.
Recreational hunting	
1.3	Operate an authorisation system for hunting Fiordland wapiti within the Wapiti Area that enables management of all hunter activity, including through the setting of terms, conditions and requirements that support adaptive management of the herd.
1.4	Specify hunting conditions by notice in the <i>New Zealand Gazette</i> , including conditions relating to the periods and times when Fiordland wapiti may be hunted. ⁸
1.5	Use a ballot and block system during the bugle period to allocate authorisations and manage recreational hunting of Fiordland wapiti.
1.6	Provide for open recreational hunting outside the bugle period, while enabling hunting authorisations and conditions to be set to support hunter management and active adaptive wapiti herd management. Authorisations and conditions may be set for the following matters: a) hunter safety risks; b) the level of demand is reducing hunter satisfaction; or c) terms, conditions and requirements are otherwise necessary for management purposes.
1.7	Require hunters to collect and provide data to support adaptive management of the herd and associated habitat.
1.8	Charge fees to hunt Fiordland wapiti to cover costs associated with managing the Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest, such as advertising, hunter education and management, and animal management activities undertaken throughout the year.
1.9	Use any revenue generated through fees, additional to that needed for management of the Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest, for conservation initiatives within the Wapiti Area or other areas of Fiordland National Park.
1.10	Engage with the hunting community when developing hunter authorisation, education and promotional materials to ensure these appropriately recognise and provide for their values and interests.

⁸ Game Animal Council Act 2013, section 18(1).

Strategy	Description
Commercial recovery and professional management operations	
1.11	Use authorised commercial recovery and professional herd management operations as part of Fiordland wapiti management, applying the following criteria: a) Incentivise commercial recovery contributions to herd management goals where necessary through subsidies funded by fees, sponsorship and other commercial partnerships associated with the Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest. b) Focus professional management operations on difficult-to-access areas where recreational hunting and commercial recovery operations cannot meet management goals, or where doing so is not commercially viable. c) Seek to meet professional herd management operation costs through fees, sponsorship and other commercial partnerships associated with the Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest. d) Focus commercial recovery and professional herd management operations on deer with the least wapiti-like characteristics.
2	Undertake monitoring and research to support management and decision-making.
Monitoring	
2.1	Develop and implement a monitoring programme to measure wapiti impacts, herd health and quality and progress towards achieving the other objectives of the Plan. Detailed methods, indicators, thresholds and response pathways will be set out in operational planning documents. The monitoring programme shall include the following: a) ecological monitoring that covers both alpine areas (above the bushline) and forested areas (below the bushline): i. which may include, but is not limited to, the following methods and tools: – seedling ratio index; – permanent 20 x 20 m plots; – alpine deer browse; and – faecal pellet counts. b) exploring the use of new monitoring methods, tools and technologies, having regard to the views of Papatipu Rūnanga, the Southland Conservation Board, Fiordland Wapiti Foundation, Game Animal Council and the Department, where relevant. c) monitoring herd health, including the size and condition of animals, growth rates, antler quality, genetic integrity and herd structure. This may include hunter harvest, such as the hunter contribution to management goals, and the age and length of jaws from animals harvested. d) monitoring voluntary and partnership contributions to management objectives. e) monitoring hunter satisfaction with the management of Fiordland wapiti: i. which may include, but is not limited to, the: – quality of Fiordland wapiti available; – hunter experience; – hunter harvest (age, gender, health of the Fiordland wapiti harvested; and general location); and – ballot and authorisation process, including the information available to hunters before and after their hunting trips.

Strategy	Description
2.2	Undertake ecological monitoring in accordance with relevant standards used or set by the Department.
2.3	Include the results from all monitoring in an annual report (see strategy 4).
Research	
2.4	Seek opportunities to undertake or support research relevant to the management of Fiordland wapiti and/or their effects within the Wapiti Area. Relevant research may relate, but is not limited to: a) changes in herd health and the genetic composition of the Fiordland wapiti herd; b) effects of Fiordland wapiti on indigenous flora, and how this compares with that of other deer species; c) movement patterns and habitat use of Fiordland wapiti within the Wapiti Area; d) potential impacts of aerial hunting on the movements and habitat utilisation of Fiordland wapiti; e) the resilience of the herd and the impact of herd management mechanisms; and f) hunter harvest and satisfaction.
2.5	Explore opportunities with Papatipu Rūnanga to incorporate mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) in management and research activities, and increase understanding of the impact of Fiordland wapiti on taonga species.
2.6	Provide relevant research findings in an annual report.
3 Foster partnerships and community stewardship.	
Partnerships	
3.1	Develop partnerships, commercial opportunities and other support to help meet the costs of implementing this plan.
3.2	Engage with Papatipu Rūnanga when developing partnerships with others to ensure that the interests and values of Ngāi Tahu, in relation to such partnerships, are considered.
3.3	Actively promote the Fiordland wapiti hunting experience to domestic and international markets.
3.4	Work with parties involved in the management of deer populations adjacent to the Wapiti Area to support effective herd management.
Stewardship	
3.5	Provide educational opportunities for communities, hunters and interested parties about the: a) contribution managing Fiordland wapiti for hunting purposes makes to improving forest and herd health; b) impacts of Fiordland wapiti on the environment and conservation values, and what the objectives of this plan are working to achieve; c) selection of Fiordland wapiti when hunting to improve conservation, herd health and recreational outcomes; d) Fiordland wapiti hunting experience; e) visitor requirements and behaviour in Fiordland National Park; and f) requirements for hunting safely.

Strategy	Description
3.6	Seek opportunities to work with Papatipu Rūnanga when developing hunter authorisation, education and promotional materials to ensure that Ngāi Tahu values and cultural information are recognised and provided for.
3.7	Seek opportunities to work with Papatipu Rūnanga to ensure that management activities recognise and reflect Ngāi Tahu values.
3.8	Provide a range of opportunities for the hunting community and other interested parties to actively contribute to: a) Fiordland wapiti herd management activities; b) initiatives that enhance the use, recreation and enjoyment of the Fiordland Wapiti Area; and c) associated conservation initiatives that promote the health and wellbeing of indigenous plants and animals in the Fiordland Wapiti Area.
3.9	Work with local communities in Te Anau and Southland to develop opportunities to participate in activities such as open days, hunter training and education days.
3.10	Work with commercial and recreational hunting communities to facilitate and support social initiatives.
3.11	Support the hunting community and other interested parties to contribute to wider conservation initiatives within the Wapiti Area, such as predator trapping, animal management programmes, and the maintenance of historic huts and public recreation infrastructure.

4 Undertake planning and reporting on management activities.

Operational planning

- 4.1 Develop annual and other operational plans to help achieve the objectives. Annual operational plans should include, but are not limited to:
- a) setting annual operational areas and annual herd management goals and focus areas, including desirable herd composition and specific locations within the Wapiti Area for herd management;
 - b) outlining methods to achieve herd and habitat management goals;
 - c) determining the annual ballot process (including ballot times and a breakdown of block dates);
 - d) identifying any other planned work or initiatives; and
 - e) identifying parties or entities responsible for management activities and related timeframes.

Annual report

- 4.2 Prepare and publish an annual report detailing the activities undertaken in the previous year, including, but not limited to:
- a) overall herd management, including the number of Fiordland wapiti harvested and controlled, the herd management method(s) used, areas where herd management occurred and the herd management effort;
 - b) results and outcomes of monitoring activities, such as ecological and habitat monitoring, and hunter participation and satisfaction evaluations;
 - c) key metrics of the ballot process and related outcomes, such as the total number of ballot entrants, bugle participants and Fiordland wapiti taken during the ballot period, and the condition and quality of the animals;

Strategy	Description
	d) sponsorships and commercial partnerships; e) hunter training, education and community initiatives; f) wider conservation activities supported; and g) opportunities to further improve management.
4.3	Include financial reporting in the annual report relating to: a) ballot processes and fees; b) Fiordland wapiti herd management and other conservation activities; c) overall expenditure on management of the Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest and contributions from the Department and/or central government; and d) monitoring.
4.4	Work with the Department when preparing the annual report before its finalisation and public release.
4.5	Present the annual report to Papatipu Rūnanga and the Southland Conservation Board, if requested.

4 Plan review, compliance and enforcement

Plan compliance and review

This plan binds the Game Animal Council and must be reviewed at intervals of not more than 5 years, in accordance with section 19 of the Game Animal Council Act.

Plan reviews are to be initiated early in the fourth year of a 5-year plan cycle. However, the Minister for Hunting and Fishing has the discretion to initiate an earlier review. Monitoring results and reporting may inform whether an earlier plan review is required.

The review will consider annual reports, monitoring data and results, and relevant research. This will be done as part of an assessment of whether the Plan's objectives and strategies are delivering the benefits expected to be gained by managing the Fiordland wapiti for hunting purposes.

Depending on review findings, the Minister for Hunting and Fishing may determine amendment of the Plan is not required.

Where the Minister for Hunting and Fishing determines review findings warrant amendment of this plan, any such amendments will be made following the process and statutory requirements set out in the Game Animal Council Act. This includes consideration of the overriding considerations, the public notification of an amended plan, and an opportunity for interested parties to make submissions.

The designation of the Wapiti Herd of Special Interest continues in force until it is revoked. The Minister may revoke the designation, following consultation and engagement with relevant interested parties.

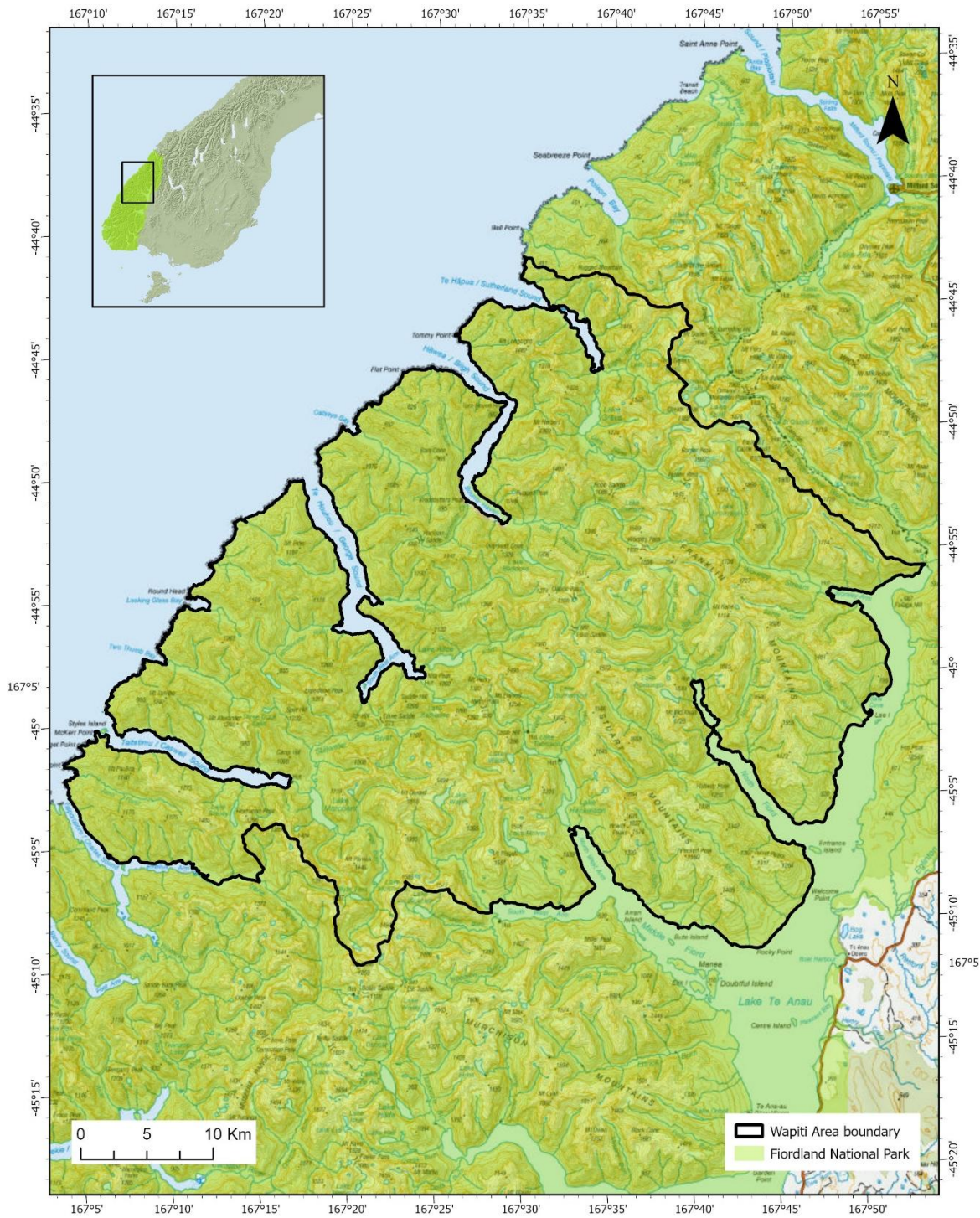
Hunter compliance and enforcement

Schedule 1 of the Game Animal Council Act sets out the compliance and enforcement framework that applies to the Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest.

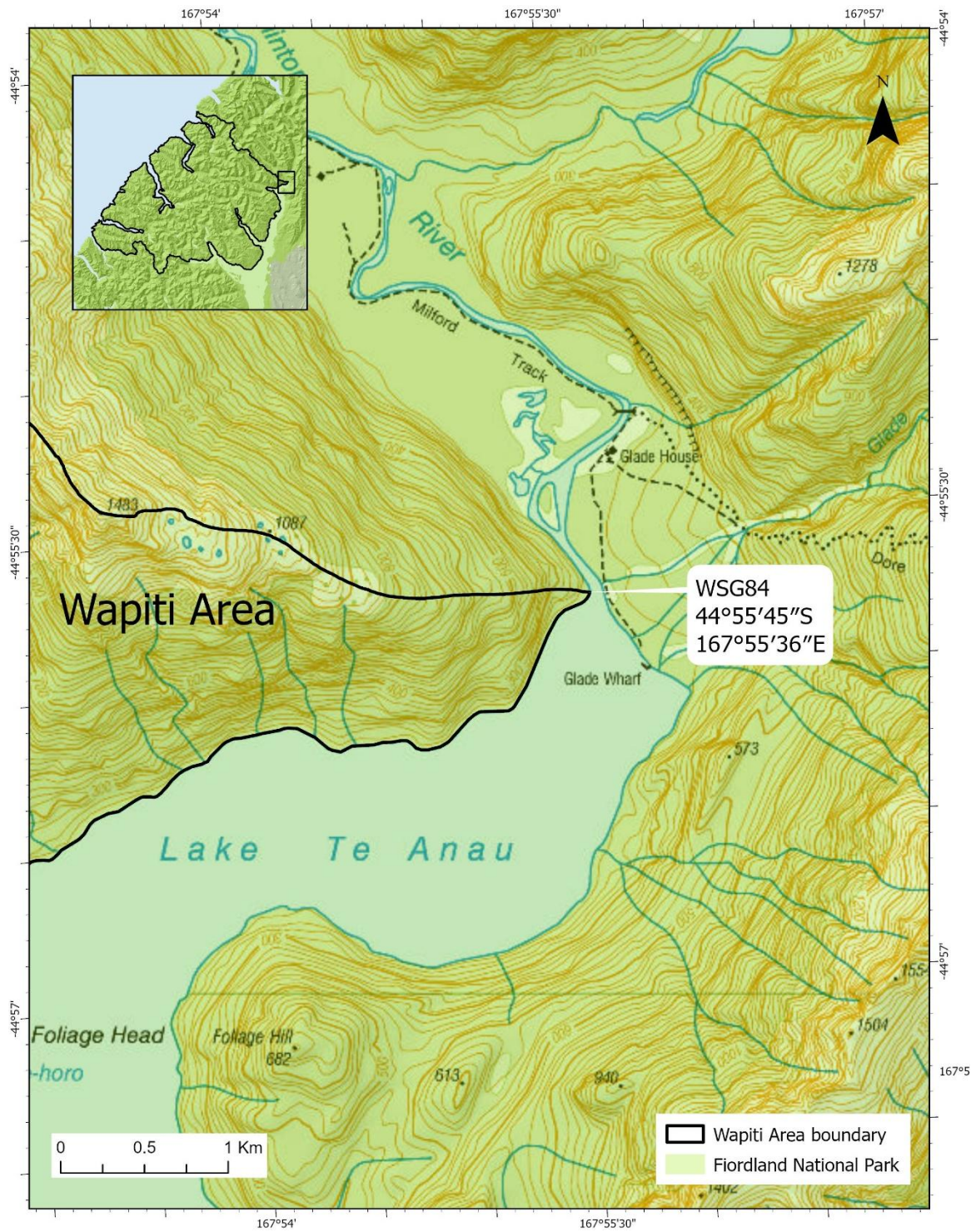
The Director-General of the Department may appoint and remove enforcement officers and honorary enforcement officers. Officers have the power to prevent or stop offending, require personal details, to search, stop any activity, and seize any animal, animal product or thing that provides evidence that an offence has been committed.

A person who hunts or kills any animal in a designated area for a herd of special interest without the appropriate authorisation, licence or permit is liable on conviction, in accordance with the Game Animal Council Act.

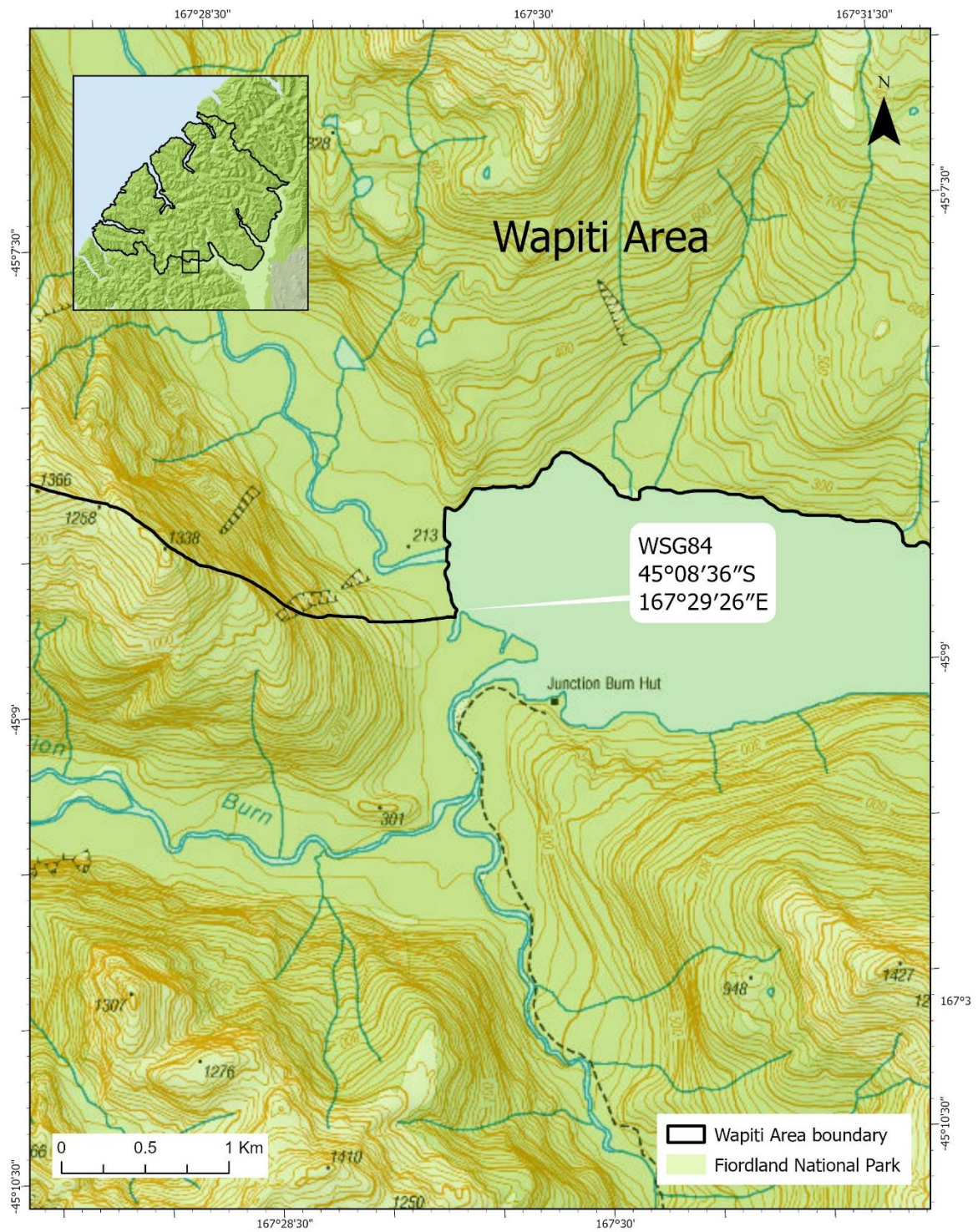
Appendix 1: Maps



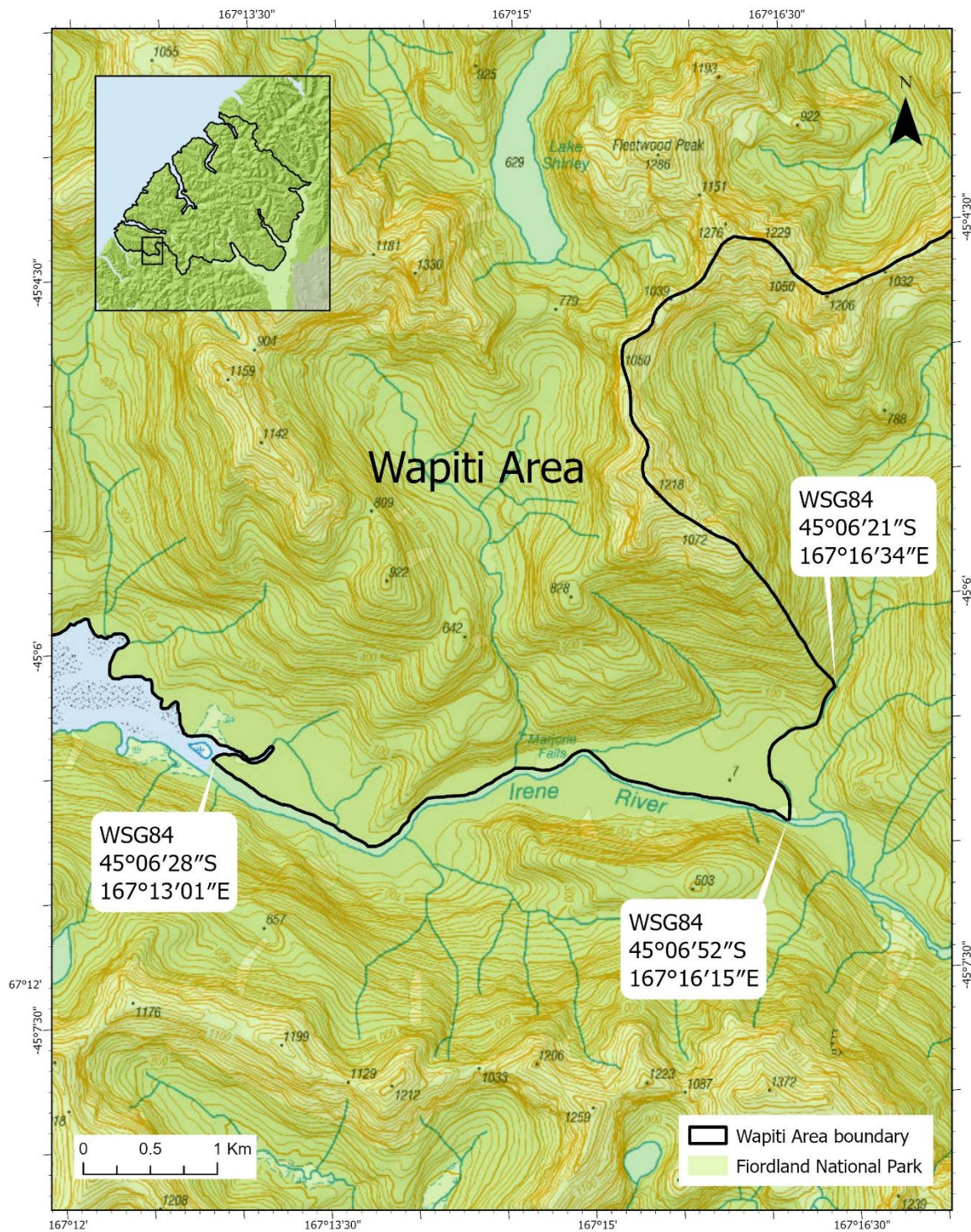
Map 1: Wapiti Area, Fiordland National Park



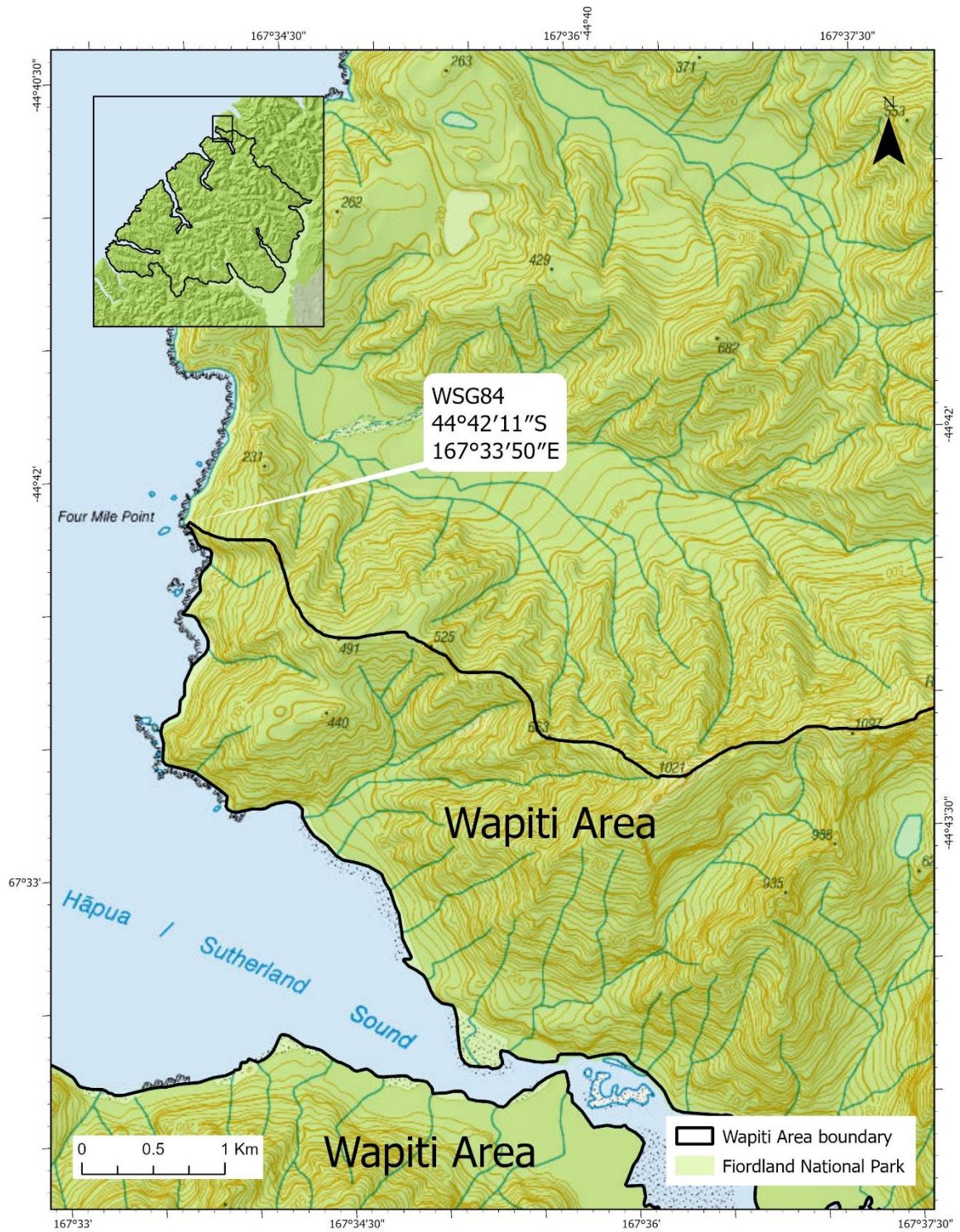
Map 2: Wapiti Area, near the true right of Clinton River mouth



Map 3: Wapiti Area, near the Doon River mouth



Map 4: Wapiti Area, near the Irene River mouth



Map 5: Wapiti Area, near Four Mile Point

Appendix 2: Expected benefits

In accordance with the requirements in section 16(3)(e) of the Game Animal Council Act 2013, the expected benefits to be gained by managing Fiordland wapiti for hunting purposes are:

- a) enhancement of an already high-quality and highly sought-after hunting experience, where hunters enjoy a unique wilderness experience;
- b) improved ecological outcomes for indigenous species and ecosystems through targeted herd management, regular monitoring and responsible harvest decision-making by the hunting community;
- c) increased opportunities for Papatipu Rūnanga to be involved in Fiordland wapiti management activities;
- d) the hunting community is empowered and actively involved in the management of Fiordland wapiti;
- e) a greater sense of responsibility and stewardship is fostered among the hunting community, with connections to the cultural and natural heritage of the Wapiti Area promoted, leading to hunters increasingly contributing to a range of conservation efforts, such as chamois and deer control, environmental monitoring, maintenance of recreation facilities, and predator control initiatives;
- f) opportunities for cost recovery and financial benefits from the user-pays contribution of hunters to herd management;
- g) hunter tourism contributing to the wellbeing of local communities, such as Te Anau; and
- h) the retention and enhancement of expertise in relation to the management of wild deer herds in New Zealand.

Glossary

Adaptive management

Adaptive management is a term used in environmental and resource management to describe a learning-based approach where management responds to changing conditions and new information. An adaptive management approach acknowledges that uncertainty exists about how ecological systems function and respond to management actions. It is designed to improve understanding of how a system works and to use this knowledge to move towards the desired outcomes. As a result, an adaptive management approach is often used to make decisions in an environment with multiple management objectives, constrained management authorities, dynamic ecological systems and uncertainty about the responses to management actions. Adaptive management often requires the participation of multiple stakeholders to help assess the problem, design activities to solve it, implement and monitor the activities, and evaluate the results.

Authorisation

A collective term for types of approvals (whether permits or otherwise) issued by the Minister for Hunting and Fishing, or their delegate, under section 18 of the Game Animal Council Act 2013.

Ballot and block system

An annual lottery process used to allocate predefined hunting areas to hunters through a random ballot draw. Those who are successful in a ballot receive an authorisation to hunt in a particular block for specified dates within the ballot period (for example, a 10-day period). Ballot systems can be used to protect and enhance the hunting experience during peak times.

Bugle

A distinctive, high-pitched, whistle-like sound produced by bull wapiti during the wapiti breeding season to attract cows. The breeding season generally occurs from mid-March to late April in the Wapiti Area and is known amongst hunters as the 'bugle period'. This is when wapiti bulls are most vocal and less cautious, which enhances the hunting experience.

Commercial hunting

Hunting undertaken by professional hunters for their livelihood and intended to maximise the take or kill of animals. This does not include guided recreational hunting, transportation of recreational hunters or other means of help for recreational hunting for which a consideration is paid.

Community

Any individual or group (whether statutory or non-statutory, formal or informal, commercial or non-commercial) with an interest in a particular issue of relevance to the Wapiti Herd of Special Interest.

Conservation board

An independent body established under section 6L of the Conservation Act 1987. The main functions and powers of conservation boards are set out in sections 6M and 6N of the Conservation Act and section 30 of the National Parks Act 1980. These functions include advising the New Zealand Conservation Authority or Director-General of the Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai on conservation matters of importance in their area. They also have an important conservation advocacy role. The relevant conservation board for this plan is the Southland Conservation Board.

Fiordland wapiti

Hybrids between wapiti deer (*Cervus canadensis*) and red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) that occur within the Wapiti Area and are subject to the *New Zealand Gazette* notice designating the Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest.

Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest Area (Wapiti Area)

The area within Fiordland National Park that is subject to the *New Zealand Gazette* notice designating the Fiordland Wapiti Herd of Special Interest, as shown on the maps in Appendix 1. This area reflects the Wapiti Hunting Area identified on Map 7 (visitor setting) in the *Fiordland National Park Management Plan 2007*.⁹

Herd management activities

Herd management activities include any activity that manipulates the demographics of the herd, including number and structure. It can include recreational hunting, commercial hunting and the professional herd management operations provided for in this plan.

Herd of special interest

A species of game animal in a specified area of public conservation land that the responsible Minister has, in accordance with the Game Animal Council Act 2013, formally designated to be managed for hunting purposes while ensuring that conservation values continue to be protected.

Hunting and hunter values

Hunting and hunter values of, or associated with, the Fiordland wapiti hunting experience include its wilderness challenge, remoteness, culture and heritage and maintaining the conditions that underpin that experience. This includes access, animal condition and quality, and opportunities for hunters to contribute to management. These values are set out in Section 2, Values and context.

Indigenous flora

Plants established in New Zealand without the help of humans, vehicles or aircraft. This includes species unique to New Zealand, as well as those found elsewhere in the world.

Minister for Hunting and Fishing

The Minister responsible for the Game Animal Council Act 2013.

Professional herd management operation

Activities to search for and shoot wild animals as a non-recreational and non-commercial activity, specifically to help achieve herd management goals. Professional herd management operations generally do not, but may, involve recovery of the animals or any parts of the animals. Professional herd management operations may selectively target wapiti based on the sex and condition of individual animals.

Recreational hunting

Hunting undertaken by recreationists where no commercial gain is involved in the activity.

⁹ Department of Conservation. 2007. *Fiordland National Park Management Plan 2007*. Invercargill: Department of Conservation (doc.govt.nz/fnp-management-plan).

World Heritage Area

A site designated under the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Convention as being of outstanding universal value for its cultural or natural heritage.

Wild animal recovery operation and venison recovery

Wild animal recovery operation refers to activities involving the use of an aircraft to search for, shoot or immobilise wild animals and the recovery of those wild animals (whether dead or alive) or any part of those animals. Venison recovery refers to the above activities when specifically recovering venison meat from a dead deer.

Wilderness area

Any part of a national park that has been set apart as a wilderness area under section 14 of the National Parks Act 1980.