

Ruahine Forest Park Adaptive Deer Management

Annual Operational Plan 2026-27

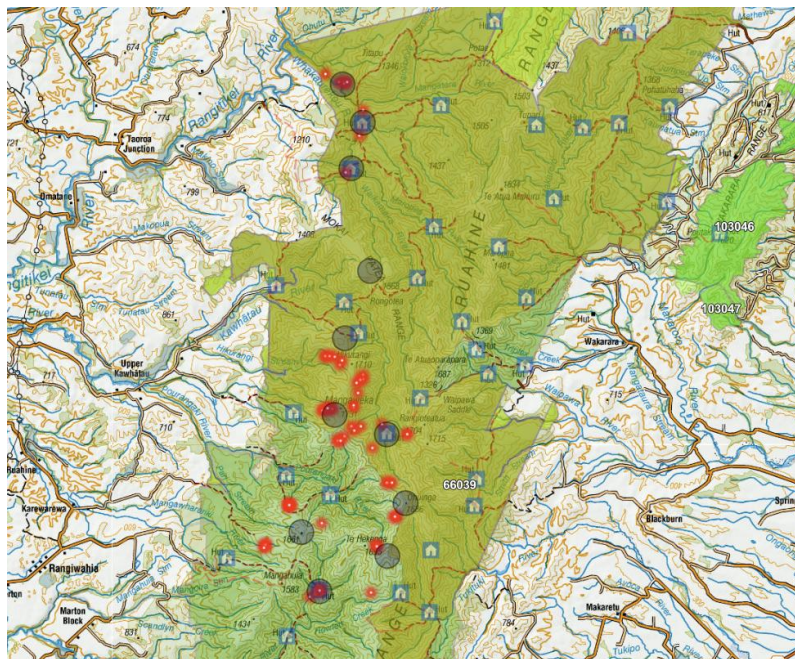
This plan is part of achieving the 2025-30 Ruahine Forest Park Adaptive Wild Deer Management Plan.

Annual operational plans outline actions we will take in the year ahead. These plans build on what we learn through our long-term, adaptive management approach and feed into our five-year strategic plan. This year, our operational plan focuses on four key areas: engagement, planning, wild deer management, and monitoring and reporting.

Overview of our 2026-27 goals

We will continue building adaptive deer management across Ruahine Forest Park to improve outcomes for biodiversity and our communities. In 2026-27 we will focus on reducing deer impacts in priority areas, improving monitoring and reporting, and strengthening partnerships with iwi, hunters, landowners and communities. We will also explore opportunities to support coordinated deer management across boundaries and use what we learn to guide future management decisions.

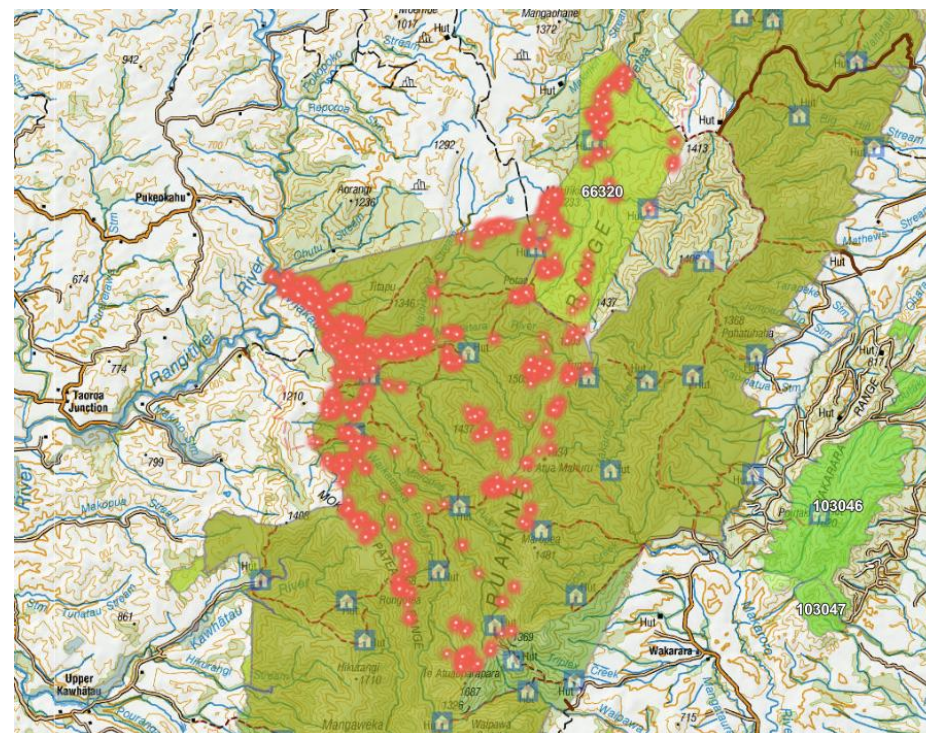
NZ Deerstalkers Association Management Hunt



NZDA hunt sites 2026 (circled) Ruahine Forest Park. Red marks indicate deer removed.

We will continue supporting NZDA management hunt actions. The NZDA management hunt in March 2026 involved 30 hunters at 11 sites. The action focusses on controlling hinds and enabling local hunters to participate in and understand adaptive deer management.

DOC-led management



DOC-led management Northwest MU – red marks indicate deer removed 2025-26

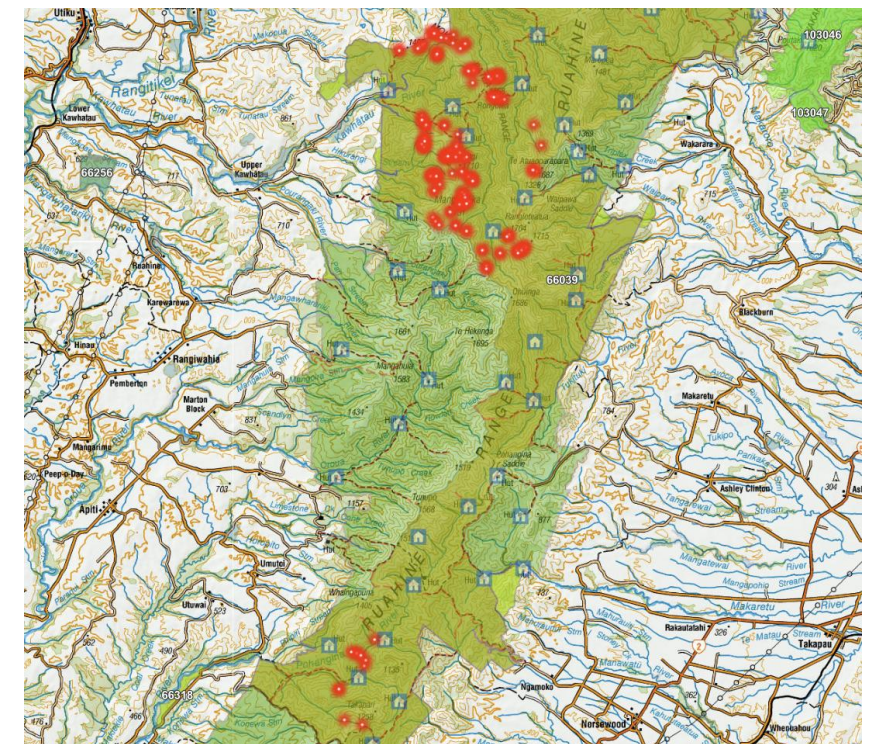
The Northwest management unit (MU) is one of the park's highest ecological priority areas and where concerted deer control is currently being maintained.

We will continue aerial hunting of deer in of Ruahine Forest Park, building on last year's removal of 857 deer. Our goal is to carry out a further 50 hours of aerial hunting using local helicopter operators.

We aim to complete monitoring, started in 2025-26, for the Northwest MU. This will monitor forest health and deer abundance using the Seedling Ratio Index and Faecal Pellet Index.

An ecological monitoring framework will be designed to cover all six park-wide management units to strengthen our understanding of Ruahine deer management and inform future decisions.

Commercial industry-WARO contract



Commercial industry contract 2025-26 – red marks indicate deer harvested

We will repeat the Wild Animal Recovery Operations (WARO) contract to support commercial venison harvest and increase wild deer removal in Ruahine Forest Park. The contract is designed to encourage harvesting lighter-weight deer, which are typically less attractive to the commercial sector.

Our initial target for this year is 250 wild deer, and we will compare results against last year's harvest of 143 deer to assess effectiveness and inform future decisions, alongside other actions..

The contract operates under standard WARO permit conditions.

Read more information here on [WARO permits](#).

2025-26 Results in brief

857 deer removed through DOC- led management NW MU	148 deer removed through WARO contract	70 deer removed through NZDA hunt	1 Deer Plan completed and website page developed with resources	342 plots with data indicating browsing is restricting palatable species	21 members of the Ruahine Deer Advisory Group
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Wild deer. Image: John Neilsen.

2026-27 Plan in brief

Action	Target	How we will measure progress
DOC-led management	50 hours aerial hunting – NW unit	Deer removed (CPUE <6/hr)
WARO Contract	250 deer - WARO permitted areas	Deer removed within contract range and within budget
Recreational hunter initiatives	1+ management hunt conducted in central park area	# hunts held, hunters engaged, hunter day equivalents, and deer removed
Community engagement	Connect with community to share learnings and develop collaborative actions	# events attended # catchment care/community groups engaged Iwi/hapū participation
Monitoring	complete transects SRI/FPI – NW management unit (MU) Design ecological monitoring framework and explore social and cultural indicators	Monitoring data collated and report completed for NW MU. An ecological monitoring framework is in place and ready for implementation across the park.

In 2026-27 we will focus on monitoring design, clearer reporting, continued deer control using multiple methods, and strengthening partnerships with iwi, hunters, landowners and communities.

Collective action plan for 2026-27

Area	Action	Who	When
Working together	Continue engagement with iwi/hapū to enable active participation, incorporate cultural values and mātauranga Māori	Iwi & DOC	Ongoing
	Explore cross-tenure opportunities where they support shared outcomes	DOC	Jun 2027
	Support initiatives to increase overall recreational hunter use of the Park.	DOC & Deer Advisory Group	Jun 2027
	Continue to facilitate meetings and share operational results with the Deer Advisory Group	DOC	Ongoing
	Examine opportunities to overcome barriers to recreational and commercial hunting sectors from contributing to management that benefits conservation outcomes	DOC & Deer Advisory Group	Dec 2026
	Strengthen relationships with hunters, landowners, councils and communities.	DOC	Jun 2027
Planning	Develop annual operation plan for 2027-28 and identify budget to support	DOC & Deer Advisory Group	Jul 2027
Deer management	Continue to enable recreational hunter-led management hunts and explore ways hunters can contribute	NZDA, GAC, & DOC	Jun 2027
	Explore iwi/hapū-led management hunts	DOC & Iwi	Jun 2027
	Explore social & cultural monitoring	NZDA, GAC, Iwi & DOC	Jun 2027
	Continue to implement a wild meat processor incentivisation operation incorporating lessons learned into the new contract	DOC, & commercial industry	Jun 2027
	Continue to implement DOC-led aerial and ground hunting operations at NW management unit	DOC	Jun 2027
Monitoring & reporting	Collate and analyse kill and track log data from hunting activities, ensure this information is sharable and accessible on the website	DOC	Jul 2027
	Complete monitoring and report on browser impacts at priority NW MU to assess efficacy of actions	DOC Monitoring Team	June 2027
	Develop and socialise an ecological monitoring framework for Park	DOC Monitoring Team	June 2027
	Produce operational report for 2026-27	DOC & Deer Advisory Group	Aug 2027