

Ruahine Forest Park Adaptive Deer Management

Annual Operational Plan 2025-26

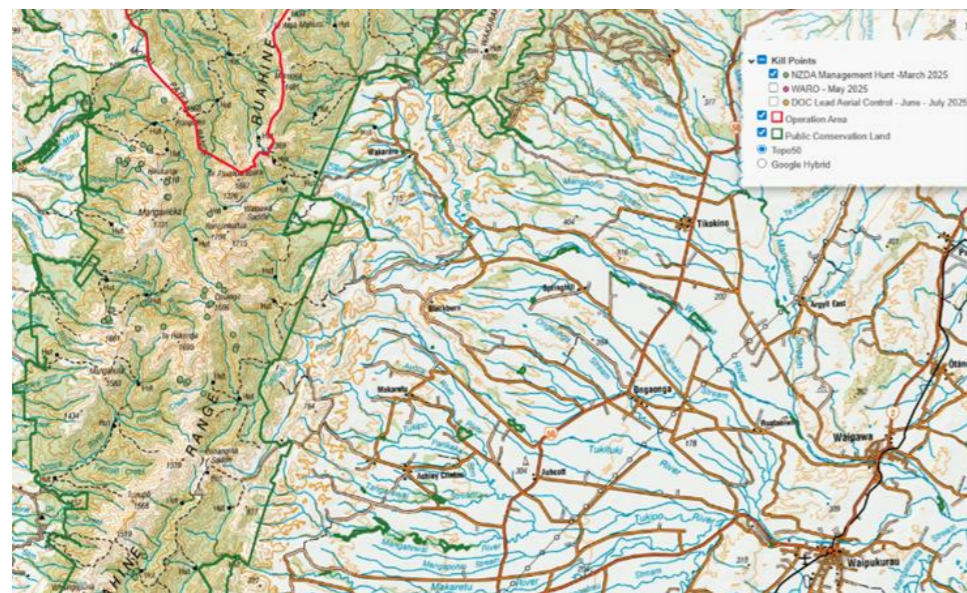
This plan is part of achieving the 2025-30 Ruahine Forest Park Adaptive Deer Management Plan.

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 2025-26 goals

- Complete the Ruahine Forest Park Wild Deer Adaptive Management Plan.
- Continue implementing hunting management actions developed in 2024-25.
- Build ecological monitoring in the northwest management unit and develop a park wide monitoring framework to support decision making and inform target setting.
- Continue partnering with iwi and engaging with the community to ensure our approach is collaborative and effective.

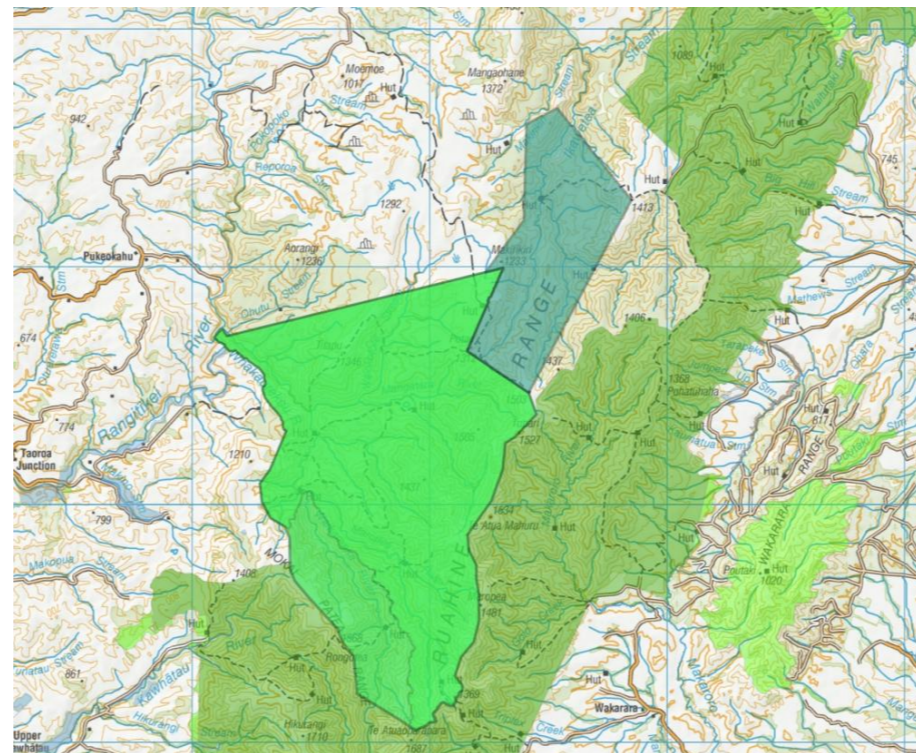
NZ Deerstalkers Association Management Hunt



Map of NZDA hunt area in the central park

Continuing an NZDA initiative started in March 2025, this action will focus on hinds and engaging local hunters. Last year this action removed 81 deer; with over 30 hunters participating, at 11 different sites. This year's results will be compared to track progress.

DOC-led management



Map northwest Ruahine Forest Park where DOC-led management occurring

We will carry out aerial hunting of deer in the northwest corner of Ruahine Forest Park, building on last year's removal of 727 deer. This area is one of the park's highest ecological priorities.

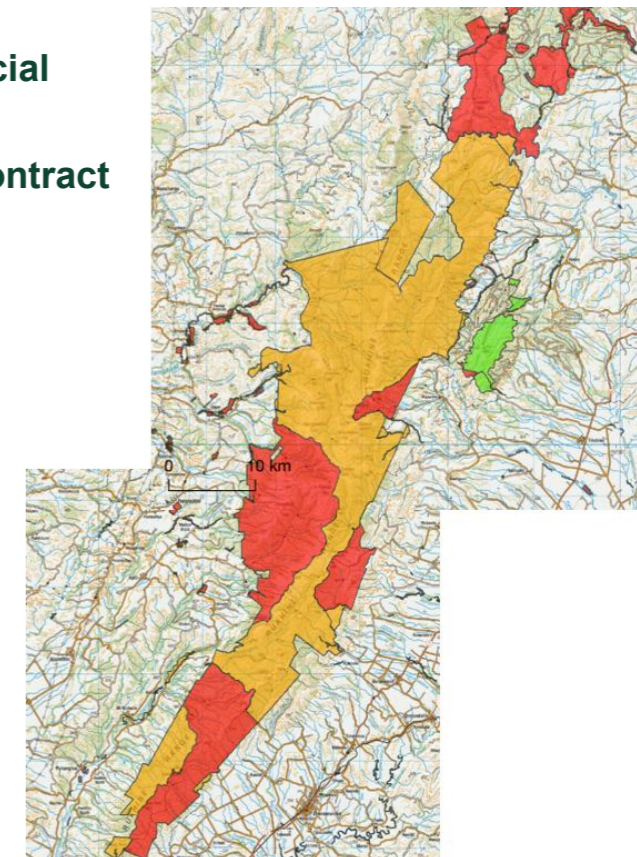
Our goal is 50 hours of aerial hunting using two local helicopter operators.

Alongside this, we will monitor forest health and deer abundance using the Seedling Ratio Index and Faecal Pellet Index. This will strengthen our understanding of Ruahine deer management and inform future decisions.

For more detail, see the [Wellington Conservation Management Strategy Vol 1 "Central Spine Place"](#) and DOC's report: [Wild animal monitoring - Ruahine Forest Park](#).

Commercial industry

WARO contract



Map of WARO areas. Green = permitted, Orange = restricted, Red = Not permitted

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 target for this year is 500 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.

For information see maps:

- [Upper Ruahine Forest Park](#)
- [Lower Ruahine Forest Park](#)

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

2024-25 Results in brief

727 deer removed through DOC- led management	143 deer removed through WARO contract	81 deer removed through NZDA hunt	1 <u>DOC monitoring report</u> using seedling ratio index (SRI) and fecal pellet index (FPI) completed	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.

2025-26 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	500 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	Wānanga/worksh ops/monitoring framework development	# events held Iwi/hapū participation Monitoring framework developed
Monitoring	10 transects completed SRI/FPR – NW unit	Monitoring reports completed Baseline data collected

This year, monitoring will focus on the NW/northwest management unit. We aim to develop a park-wide monitoring framework that sets out what we measure, how often, and how results will inform adaptive decisions. In the meantime, we will use DOC's national monitoring to guide park-level management. From this, we can draw inferences about deer removal targets and apply lessons from the northwest unit and similar work elsewhere.

Over time, this approach will help answer key questions:

- How much aerial hunting is needed to improve forest health?
- Can the industry/WARO contract model reduce deer abundance?
- How can recreational hunter initiatives complement other control methods?
- Are engagement activities strengthening partnerships and shared goals?
- How does monitoring help us understand what works and guide future decisions?

Collective action plan for 2025-26

Area	Action	Who	When
Working together	Continue to build relationships with iwi/hapū to enable incorporation of Te Ao Māori concepts and storytelling	Iwi & DOC	Ongoing
	Delivery of planning wānanga with iwi/hapū	Iwi & DOC	Jun 2026
	Explore design, delivery workshop about wild meat harvest	DOC & Deer Advisory Group	Jun 2026
	Continue to facilitate meetings and communications for 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 2025
	Connect with surrounding landowners, rural communities and Regional Councils	DOC	Mar 2026
Planning	Define management units (MU) and prioritise hunting effort and associated monitoring across Park	DOC	Jun 2026
Deer management	Continue to enable recreational hunter-led management hunts and explore ways hunters can contribute	NZDA, GAC, & DOC	Jun 2026
	Incorporate iwi/hapū-led management hunt	DOC & Iwi	Jun 2026
	Develop a system or survey to get feedback on the recreational hunting experience	NZDA, GAC, & DOC	Jun 2026
	Continue to implement a wild meat processor incentivisation operation incorporating lessons learned into the new contract	DOC, & commercial industry	Jul 2026
	Continue to implement DOC-led aerial and ground hunting operations at NW management unit	DOC	Jul 2026
Monitoring & reporting	Collate and analyse kill and track log data from hunting activities, ensure this information is sharable and accessible on the website	DOC Wild Animals Team	Jul 2026
	Analyse and report on monitoring of browse impact at priority MU to assess efficacy of actions	DOC Monitoring Team	May 2026
	Development of integrated ecological, social and cultural monitoring framework for Park	DOC Monitoring Team	May 2026
	Produce operational report for 2025-26	DOC & Deer Advisory Group	Jul 2026
	Develop annual operation plan for 2026-27 and identify budget to support	DOC & Deer Advisory Group	Jul 2026