

# Wapiti Herd of Special Interest Proposal Summary

The Fiordland Wapiti Foundation (FWF) has proposed establishing a Herd of Special Interest (HOSI) for wapiti deer in the Fiordland National Park.

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## The proposed location:

The proposed area for the HOSI covers 190,700 hectares of Fiordland National Park. This represents approximately 15% of the total area of the national park. The area is the same location as the existing 'Wapiti Area' in Fiordland National Park, where FWF is currently carrying out deer management and other activities under a community agreement with the Department of Conservation (DOC). The whole of Fiordland National Park is part of the Te Wāhipounamu – South West New Zealand World Heritage Area listed by UNESCO – the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

## The objectives the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation are proposing:

The proposal seeks to continue to provide recreational hunters with similar access to the area as they have now, while focusing on an improved experience, with better quality animals at lower densities, and more rigorous environmental monitoring which informs adaptive herd management and better promotes the regeneration of indigenous flora in forest and alpine habitats.

In summary, the proposal aims to manage the wapiti deer herd to a level that is compatible with:

### Ecological Objectives

- Promoting the regeneration of browsed indigenous flora in forest and alpine habitats.
- Achieving the following ecological monitoring targets by year 10 of the HOSI management operations:
  - **Forested areas:** Seedling ratio index (used to provide quantitative assessment of forest understorey condition from ungulate impacts) of  **$\geq 0$**  for selected deer preferred species of flora
  - **Alpine areas:** browse levels of **10% or less** on three alpine species, known to be susceptible to deer browse and which represent good indicators of habitat condition

### Hunting Objectives

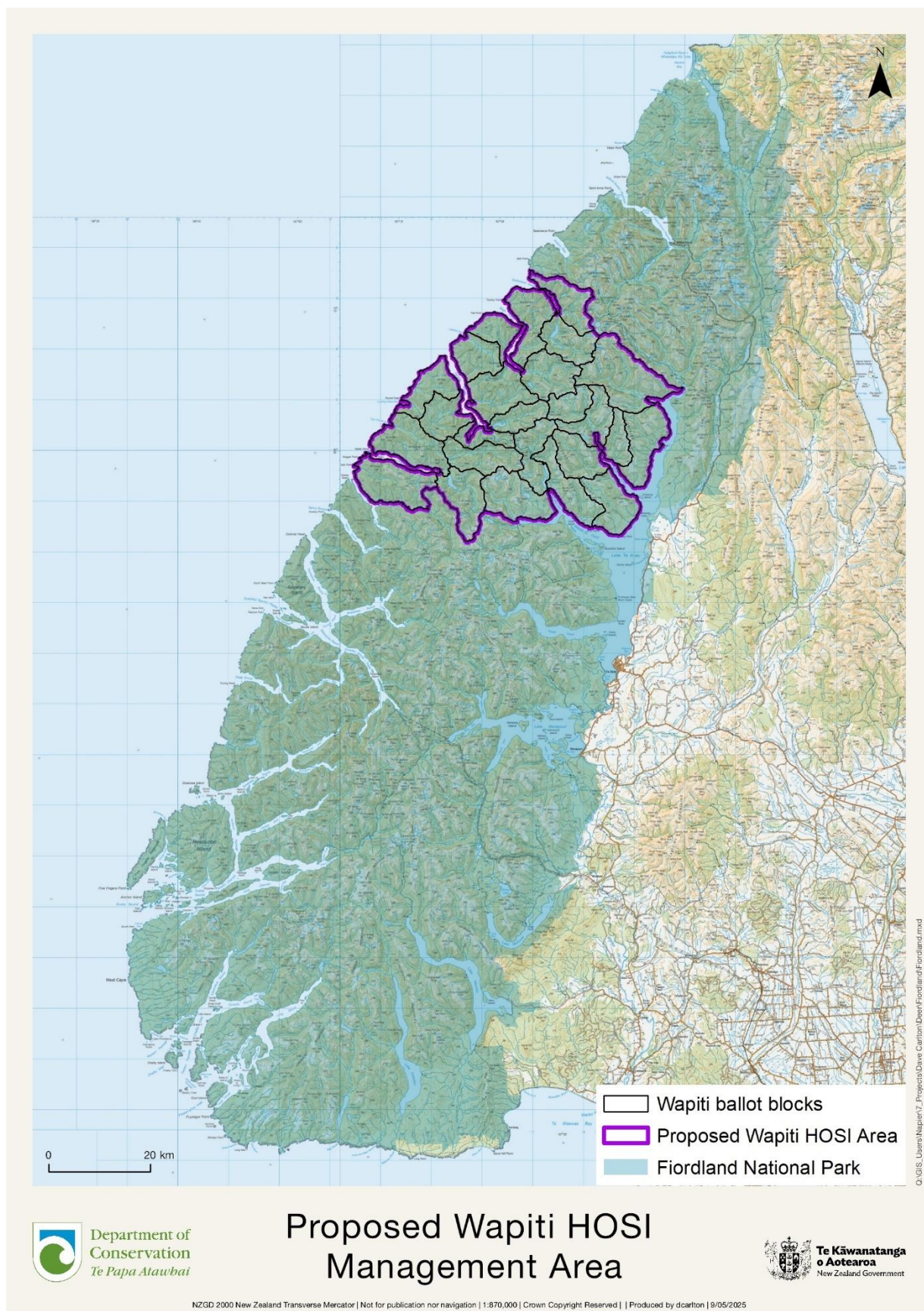
- Generating male wapiti with desirable trophy quality.
- Maximising recreational hunting opportunities and enhancing hunter satisfaction.
- Encouraging recreational harvest that supports the herd's genetic and trophy integrity and supports the viability of commercial deer recovery operations.

### Collaboration Objectives

- Building strong partnerships with aligned businesses and other organisations.
- Supporting the maintenance of or increases in non-government funding streams for deer management.
- Providing opportunities for others to contribute to management.

## The area proposed to be managed:

Figure 1. Map of the proposed HOSI area and management blocks within the wider Fiordland National Park.



## The operations proposed:

The area for the HOSI is proposed to be divided into 25 management blocks (see in Figure 1). Operationally, ecological monitoring will not be possible for each individual block. Landscape-wide vegetation and herd health monitoring would be undertaken at the appropriate scale to measure impacts of deer browse in forested and alpine environments. This would guide adaptive annual harvest/deer removal targets, and the necessary management measures.

Depending on the level of management required, the following methods would likely be applied:

### Wild Animal Recovery Operations (WARO):

- Professional deer carcass removal operations, focusing on females and deer with no/weaker wapiti traits, and subsidised by FWF, where deemed necessary.

### Other deer management interventions

- Hunter harvesting – FWF undertakes annual balloting of the hunting of 25 management blocks during the bugle ('roar') period (March – April) for recreational hunters to hunt wapiti deer.
- Culling operations – additional culling of deer by FWF where hunter harvest and WARO do not meet annual deer removal targets.

## Community involvement proposed:

The proposal provides for unpaid voluntary support through FWF by members of the community wishing to contribute time and resources to wapiti herd management. This would build on the current estimate of 2,600 volunteer hours committed annually to wapiti management, predator trapping and other FWF initiatives.

Partnerships with businesses and other conservation groups bolstering funding and resources for FWF initiatives. It is proposed that the status of partnerships and voluntary contributions is monitored over time to improve levels of partnership and efficiencies.

Promote greater awareness in the wider community of the value of wapiti hunting to hunters, the Western Southland community and economy, and the environment.

## HOSI management proposed:

The Minister can only delegate the management of a HOSI to DOC or the New Zealand Game Animal Council. This proposal suggests that management functions are shared between the Game Animal Council and DOC. The FWF would be contracted to undertake operational delivery on behalf of the GAC. Broadly speaking, the proposal is for:

- GAC to develop and maintain relevant management systems and hunter education platforms, undertake research, and assess costs and options for cost recovery.
- DOC to lead ecological monitoring, regulatory oversight and provide operational and administrative support.
- FWF contracted to undertake and report on day-to-day operational wapiti HOSI management functions.

## The funding proposed:

The proposal estimates that the annual operational cost for administering a wapiti HOSI will be at least \$417,000, in addition to \$40,000 for annual vegetation monitoring. The full estimated costs will depend on the scale, scope and targets determined during the statutory process for designating a HOSI. These will be

determined together with the Herd Management Plan. There will be costs for deer management and monitoring, as well as ecological monitoring, enforcement and reporting. It is anticipated that costs will be covered by both Crown and non-Crown entities. The expectation in the proposal is that the Crown cover at least the costs for monitoring and enforcement. Non-Crown funding could be either through direct funding from FWF or in-kind voluntary contributions such as time and expertise.

### **Wapiti Ballot and other Non-Crown Funding**

The costs of animal management activities undertaken by FWF are currently met by money raised through the Wapiti Ballot, sponsorship, fundraising, and deer recovery. The proposal is for FWF to meet costs associated with the HOSI by retaining fees associated with the Wapiti Ballot, and retain / increase sponsorship and fundraising activities, and increase the profitability of deer recovery.

Further information on the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation and its proposal can be found at [www.fwf.net.nz](http://www.fwf.net.nz)



## Summary of Deer Management in Fiordland National Park at Present

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Fiordland Wapiti Foundation (FWF) are currently managing deer populations in a designated area of Fiordland National Park, often referred to as the 'Wapiti Area'. This is the same as the area that is included in the FWF proposal for a wapiti HOSI. This is where most of the deer with wapiti-like traits are concentrated. Red deer are also found throughout the National Park and produce fertile offspring when mating with wapiti deer or red-wapiti hybrids. The FWF has been undertaking wild animal control activities in the Wapiti Area of the National Park since 2005 as well as contributing funding towards DOC-led suppression of wild animals in the Murchison Mountains within Fiordland National Park.

The FWF currently collects jaws and hunter reports from ballot holders. Jaws are aged and jaw length is recorded to monitor the status of the herds age structure, genetic integrity and growth rates. Hunter harvest is recorded to monitor the bull harvest in relation to herd status and to record hunter contributions to deer removal targets.

The existing management arrangement between DOC and the Foundation is set out in a community agreement made under the Conservation Act 1987. The agreement aims to achieve a level of deer control within the Wapiti Area that allows for the regeneration of browsed indigenous plants. It does not talk about managing wild animals for hunting purposes.

DOC leads wild animal control efforts elsewhere in Fiordland National Park, including in the Murchison Mountains for the conservation of takahē, and through wild animal recovery operations across the remainder of Fiordland National Park.

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Department of Conservation

Conservation House Head Office

PO Box 10420

Wellington 6011, New Zealand

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Phone: 0800 275 362

General email: [wildanimalmanagement@doc.govt.nz](mailto:wildanimalmanagement@doc.govt.nz);

Wapiti HOSI email: [wapitihosihmp@doc.govt.nz](mailto:wapitihosihmp@doc.govt.nz)

For more information, including next steps see: [Wapiti deer proposal for a Herd of Special Interest](#)