Tahr Control Operational Plan: 1 July 2025 – 30 June 2026

Purpose

To detail an annual work plan that moves towards achieving the objectives of the Himalayan Thar Management Policy 1991 and Himalayan Thar Control Plan 1993 (HTCP), within the context of the statutes for which lands are administered.

Context

The Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai (DOC) and Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu continue to give effect to the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in relation to implementing the HTCP. This plan has been informed by the results of previous tahr control operational plans,[1] results of monitoring tahr populations, and contributions from members of the Tahr Plan Implementation Liaison Group (TPILG).

Since 2018, substantial resources have been allocated to tahr control. This commitment has delivered increased and more targeted tahr control, increased monitoring and generated closer engagement with partners and stakeholders. This plan continues that work, while also acknowledging that even with the information obtained in recent years, managing tahr is scientifically and logistically complex.

Implementing the adaptive approach to management envisaged in the HTCP requires a collaborative commitment to working flexibly and making decisions based on the best available information, within the policy context. Decisions are made as uncertainty is reduced through the steps outlined below and as new factors arise (for instance, the variation in tahr harvest through the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent recovery of aerially assisted trophy hunting (AATH)). In 2025/26, the programme will build on substantial information acquired from previous years and that obtained during the year, including:

- results from past aerial and ground-based control programmes
- data on tahr populations from repeated scientific surveys in selected locations, reports from field staff and observations of stakeholders
- analysis of data from long-term vegetation plots that will gradually provide vegetation condition trends over time
- progress towards developing hunter-led management in Management Unit 1 (MU1).

Over 2025/26, the TPILG will provide for effective collaboration amongst parties with interests in the implementation of the HTCP. This will include advising DOC and working together to enhance contributions to the HTCP implementation.

Scope

Included: This Tahr Control Operational Plan (TCOP) covers management of tahr from 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026, including:

- control of tahr on public conservation land (PCL)
- contributions from recreational and concession hunting, including hunter-led management activities, guiding, commercial tahr recovery and AATH
- contributions to implementing the HTCP on land tenures other than PCL
- research and monitoring relating to tahr.

Excluded: This document does not deal with:

- tahr control beyond 30 June 2026
- issues beyond the scope of the HTCP (e.g. new or changed access to PCL)
- issues within the HTCP that are beyond the scope of operational planning (e.g. tahr farming)
- operational issues that would require a change to the HTCP (e.g. changes to tahr population targets or management unit boundaries).

Content outside the scope of this TCOP may be progressed through the TPILG, based on careful evaluation of priorities and the availability and capacity of DOC and TPILG members.

Contributions to control

A variety of contributors will deliver measures to control tahr populations as required to move towards the goals of the HTCP. Forms of control are listed below.

- Recreational hunting contributes substantially within the feral range. Hunting will be supported by proactive communication with recreational hunting permit holders (including providing information on observations of tahr), ballots and other initiatives to improve hunters' contributions.
- During the 2025/26 operational period, an improvement in the understanding of recreational hunters' contributions to tahr control is expected, through the New Zealand Game Animal Council's 2024/2025 Hunting Research Project. The results of this research will be considered in the delivery of the 2025/26 TCOP and contribute to the planning of future operations.
- Hunter-led management may start in MU1 and contribute additional tahr control during this TCOP period, through a partnership between hunting organisations and Te Rūnanga o Arowhenua.
- Additional structured recreational hunting opportunities will contribute to implementing the HTCP within the feral range.
- Guided hunting, including AATH, will contribute in areas permitted by concessions. AATH trophy harvest is undertaken by concessionaires on PCL and is governed by DOC permit conditions that include a code of practice.
- For each AATH trophy taken on PCL, an operator is required to undertake an environmental offset (i.e. the control of five female or juvenile tahr). AATH environmental offsets will substantially contribute to tahr control within the feral range in 2025/26. The timing and location of environmental offset control are directed by DOC. These requirements may change following the issue of new concessions due by May 2025.
- Commercial tahr carcass recovery may contribute over the year as allowed on non-PCL and under the conditions of concessions to be applied for and issued for PCL. The wild animal recovery operations systems analysis completed in 2023 may influence the role of wild animal recovery operations in tahr control when carcass recovery is considered during this operational period (levels of tahr carcass recovery have been low from PCL over the past decade).
- Official control funded by DOC will continue in national parks, within management units, within the feral range outside the management units, and outside the feral range. Indicative control allocations are provided in this plan but will be refined throughout the season based on information including: the level of other contributions to control (e.g. AATH environmental offsets), further data on tahr populations, observations from DOC staff and others, and opportunities for operational efficiency.
- DOC will build an understanding of the contribution to, and need for, control on other tenures and will work with land managers to implement control in key locations.

Applying a flexible approach

DOC, together with the TPILG members, is committed to using the best available information, including stakeholder knowledge. This approach will be enhanced over the coming years as better data becomes available and longer term strategies are enabled. In the short term, this requires flexibility in the delivery of this plan.

Approximately halfway through the official control effort a review will be carried out to consider optimal use of the remaining control effort. This review will involve the New Zealand Game Animal Council.

DOC's control of tahr to date has targeted PCL, but it is recognised that tahr are present at high densities on other tenures in some areas. The HTCP applies across all tenures; greater efforts by other land managers to control tahr populations will help tahr control outcomes across and outside the feral range.

To enhance opportunities for collaborative learning and advance understandings of the main issues of common concern, DOC intends to:

- adapt the official control resource allocation throughout 2025/26 to optimise the cumulative effect of control from all sources; the resources external to DOC will become more apparent during the season, requiring an adaptive approach (e.g. AATH environmental offset numbers are generally not finalised until September)
- continue working with hunting organisations, Te Rūnanga o Arowhenua and Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu to support implementation of hunter-led management in MU1
- apply lessons learnt from previous TCOPs to further optimise contributions from targeted recreational hunting
- encourage and support other agencies and land managers to contribute to improving landscape-scale tahr control outcomes.

1 See the Tahr Control Operational Plans on DOC's website at: **www.doc.govt.nz/tahrcontrolplans**.

Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
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Research and monitoring

Implementation of the HTCP requires continued research and monitoring. In 2025/26, this work will include DOC's own planned programme, collaborative programmes, and facilitating the work of others to:

- improve our understanding of tahr browsing impacts through expanded analysis of existing vegetation data, building on 2024/25 analysis of tussock height data
- update field measurements from three tussock grassland monitoring sites, beginning the process for a 5-yearly update of tussock plot data to help understand tahr browse impacts and vegetation recovery trends
- consider whether to implement, and at what scale, a revised tahr browse impacts method, based on data analysed during 2024/25
- use and build on information about tahr populations from surveys and population modelling to inform future management action, noting that the level of precision and cost of estimating tahr populations means that surveys are conducted periodically (and will not be updated this year).

Operational specifications

DOC remains committed to resourcing official control over 2025/26, as it has in recent years. Overall population estimates, DOC field staff observations and stakeholder reports show that populations remain well above the HTCP requirements within the feral range at many locations. In some locations, information suggests that populations have reduced and male-biased sex ratios, because of control targeting females, may be leading to reduced recruitment. This is expected from effective control. Until populations at most locations in the feral range are nearing the intervention densities specified in the HTCP, and encounters outside the feral range are further reduced, operational effectiveness will remain the prime determinant for locations and methods of control.

Acknowledging that an adaptive management approach may require flexibility in operational decisions, the initial planned official control effort for 2025/26 is 320 hours of aerial search and control or equivalent official effort through other delivery methods. This level of effort and its indicative allocation across and beyond the feral range were determined based on available resources (DOC and other contributors), data, and observations from previous operational plans and contributions from DOC staff and TPILG members.

Of the 320 hours, an indicative total of around 130 hours to 140 hours of search and control effort is allocated for operations outside the feral range. This includes over 40 hours planned within the exclusion zones, while remaining effort primarily focuses on populations outside the feral range that risk northward or southward expansion. Any practical, opportunistic tahr control outside the feral range that is integrated with other control operations (e.g. wallaby, goat, pig control) will represent additional effort to the 130 hours to 140 hours.

The remaining 180 hours to 190 hours of official control effort are allocated to operations inside the feral range. Allocation of official control resources within the feral range will reflect the priorities outlined below.

Priorities for control for 2025/26

Priorities for this year are to:

- continue applying a strategic approach to official tahr control outside the feral range (including exclusion zones), targeting all tahr (including identifiable males) (see figure 1 on page 3 for a map of the feral range, including management units and exclusion zones)
- focus on progressive containment of known high-risk outlying populations outside the feral range (with a long-term view towards elimination of those populations)
- prevent spread from the feral range by removing tahr from areas within the feral range outside the management units, particularly near the feral range boundary
- take the Aoraki / Mount Cook and Westland Tai Poutini National Parks to the lowest practicable tahr density (to achieve this, official control will be optimised to target breeding populations, but all tahr encountered (including identifiable males) will be controlled)
- within management units, target official control to the areas of highest tahr densities and/or impacts and/or where control presents challenges (e.g. West Coast forest ecosystems)
- not control identifiable males in operations undertaken in management units 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7 nor outside the management units but inside the feral range
- bring the overall tahr population towards intervention levels in the HTCP by optimising the cumulative effect of all control sources, for example, AATH environmental offsets will be directed by DOC, likely targeting areas of highest tahr density where less official control is planned (see the table on page 4 for detail), while structured recreational hunting opportunities will contribute in areas where aerial control may be less effective.

Control tools for 2025/26

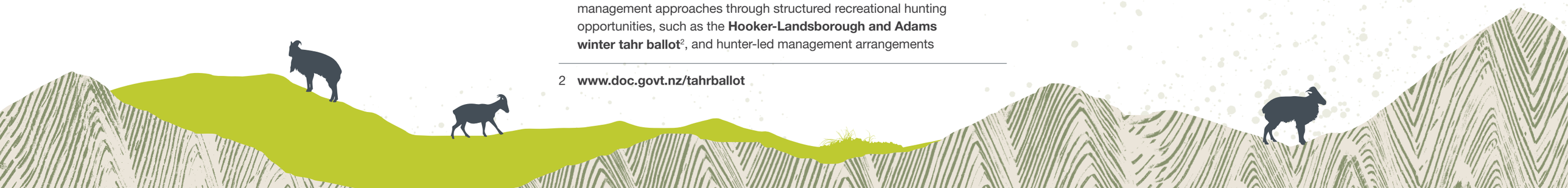
As a principle, DOC will continue to enable the reduction of tahr populations as required by the HTCP, using various available control methods. In 2025/26, DOC will:

- maintain substantial investment in official ground-based hunting; over 30% of official control effort may be ground based in 2025/26
- vary the approaches to aerial control (e.g. timing, location, new technologies) to improve efficiency and reduce animal habituation to control methods
- continue and further develop existing contributions to population management approaches through structured recreational hunting opportunities, such as the **Hooker-Landsborough and Adams winter tahr ballot**[2], and hunter-led management arrangements
- further enhance control through recreational hunting contributions, primarily by providing improved information from DOC directly, and contributing through partnership efforts
- work with guided hunting and commercial recovery operators to encourage and facilitate opportunities for commercial control, including directing the delivery of AATH environmental offsets to integrate with official control operations
- work collaboratively with others to understand and improve recreational hunter participation and effectiveness, including considering information gathered by the New Zealand Game Animal Council hunting research project; this will also include providing information on maps of known high-density areas, identifiable male sightings and easy-to-access areas with high numbers, and communicating directly with hunting permit holders.

Official control work in the feral range

- All operations shall record data in a standardised way and meet DOC's minimum requirements for tahr control.
- Control data shall be made publicly available once verified (as with previous years).
- Where practicable, official aerial control within the feral range will be concentrated between 1 July and 15 November 2025, to avoid kid-drop and peak recreational use periods. In some limited circumstances, aerial control may be used as targeted support for ground-based operations later in the operational period.
- Official control in national parks will start from 4 August 2025, providing recreational and commercial hunters with additional time to take bull tahr before this.
- DOC will work with AATH concessionaires to, where practicable, deliver environmental offsets between 1 July and 15 November 2025. In some areas, official control may start from 14 July or later, to avoid operational conflict with AATH offsets. More certainty will be available after the February to April 2025 AATH concessionaire activity returns are assessed.
- Ground-based control may occur at other times.
- Control activities will consider recreational users, including hut users and/or hunters, trampers, climbers and so on. If recreational users are sighted, the control shall move to another location.
- No official aerial control will take place over a public holiday weekend.
- Inside the feral range, except in national parks, white tahr will not be targeted by official control.
- DOC will advise when the official aerial control in a management unit has been completed for the year.

2 **www.doc.govt.nz/tahrballot**



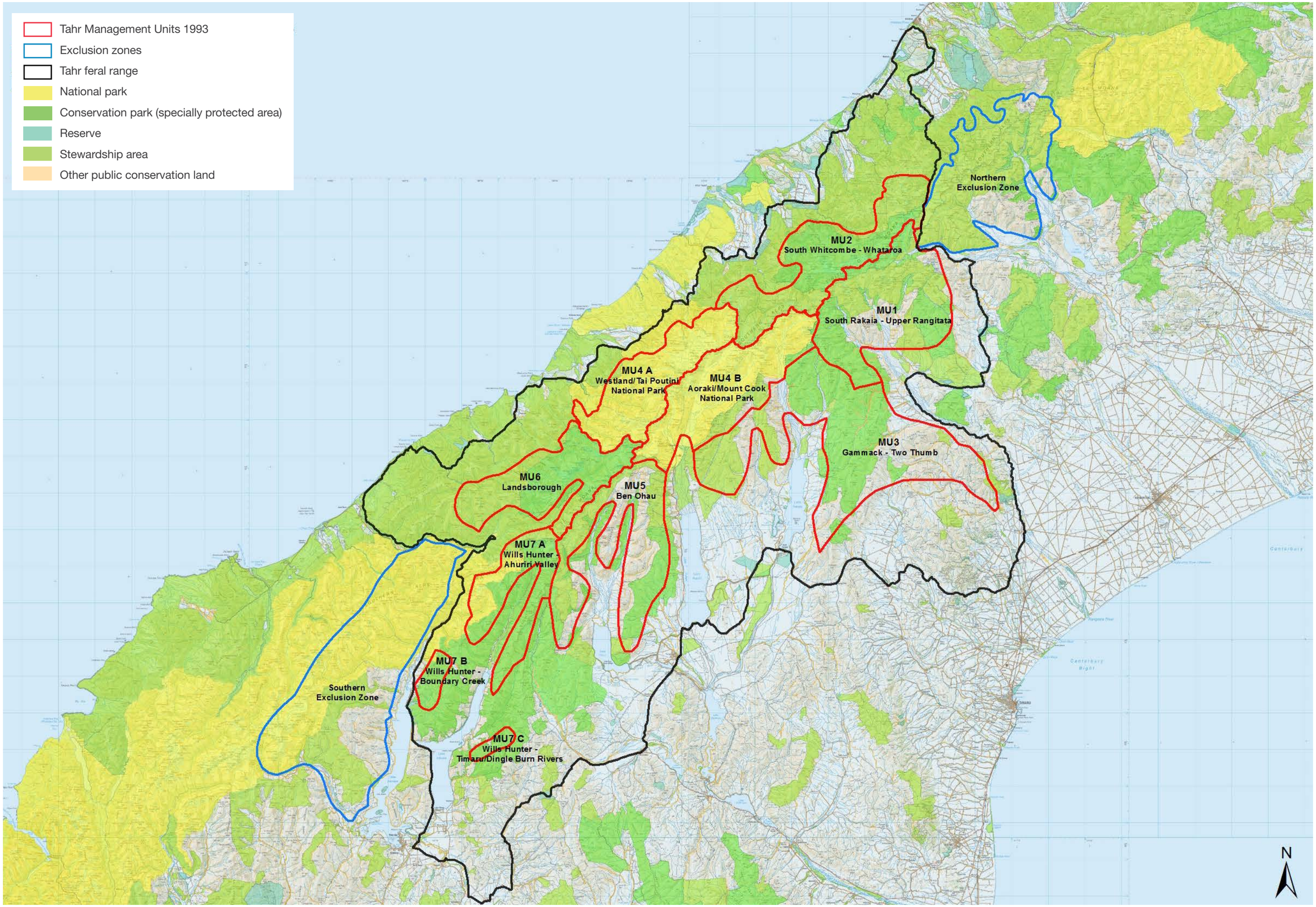


Figure 1: A map of the tahr feral range, including management units and exclusion zones.

Priority order of management unit in Himalayan Thar Control Plan 1993	**Intervention levels of tahr per square kilometre (km²) and population size in Himalayan Thar Control Plan 1993**	**Control parameters in Himalayan Thar Control Plan 1993**	**Control priority in meeting Himalayan Thar Control Plan 1993 targets**	**Approach:** ▸ **Control tools will be applied adaptively throughout the season to optimise the cumulative effect of control from all sources.** ▸ **Recreational hunting will contribute throughout the feral range.** ▸ **Official control will prioritise preventing spread beyond the feral range, reducing toward zero density in national parks and targeting populations of higher density and/or where substantial impacts are observed.** ▸ **Landowners with feral tahr will be encouraged to reduce densities to Himalayan Thar Control Plan 1993 targets.** ▸ **Aerially assisted trophy hunting (AATH) environmental offsets will be used as a control tool at the direction of the Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai (DOC), along with the planned 340 hours of official control.**			
				Recreational hunting	**Guided hunting: ground-based guided hunting throughout the period. AATH where permitted between 10 February and 31 August, subject to the exclusions listed below.[1]**	**Commercial tahr recovery, including taking bull tahr for capes (requires a permit; may include Christmas and roar closures).**	**Official control represented by allocated aerial control hours (or equivalent investment in alternative methods). Resource allocation here is indicative and will be adapted during the Tahr Control Operational Plan period to reflect best available information and optimise the cumulative effect of all control sources. The available official control resource is around 320 hours, in addition to external sources (e.g. AATH environmental offsets).**
Outside the feral range	Eliminate spread.	Control all tahr.	Official control incorporating ground surveillance in critical areas.				Around 130 hours to 140 hours of official search and control, targeting areas south and north of the feral range, including approximately 50 hours within the exclusion zones.[2] All tahr encountered will be controlled. Scope feasibility of eradicating high-priority outlying populations and implement operations where considered feasible.
Inside the feral range but outside the management units	No current target.	Intent is to constrain the breeding population and prevent migration to outside the feral range.		Encourage hunters to look for, shoot, and report tahr.		1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026.[3] Carcass recovery to target nannies and juveniles only.	High priority for official aerial control and AATH environmental offsets in areas of higher density. 15 to 25 hours of official control investment, integrated with management unit control and applied flexibly along the feral range and management unit boundaries. Identifiable males will not be targeted.
I. Wills/Makarora/Hunter (Management Unit 7)	Less than 1/km² and a population of less than 100.	Tahr densities not to exceed 5/km² for any localised area. Female–kid groups to be restricted, especially close to unit boundaries, to 10 or fewer per group. Recreational and commercial hunting encouraged, official control where not within set levels.	Encourage recreational and commercial hunting first. Official control as required.	Encourage hunters to look for, shoot, and report tahr.		1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026.[3] Carcass recovery to target nannies and juveniles only.	Limited allocation of official control resources to treat localised hotspots, if required, likely in conjunction with inside the feral range control. May be delivered by aerial or ground-based control. 0 to 5 hours of official control investment. Identifiable males will not be targeted.
II. Landsborough (Management Unit 6)	1.5/km² and a population of 900.		Encourage increased recreational, guided, and commercial hunting. Official control as required.	Encourage hunters to look for, shoot and report tahr. Ballots in wilderness area. Continue structured recreational hunting opportunities.	No AATH within tahr ballot areas (within Hooker/Landsborough Wilderness Area) before conclusion of the tahr ballot.	1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026[3] outside the Hooker/Landsborough tahr ballot area. No recovery from within the Hooker/Landsborough tahr ballot area during tahr ballot period. Carcass recovery to target nannies and juveniles only.	High priority for control inside the feral range. Aerial control to be delivered through a combination of AATH environmental offsets and official aerial control. Official control to include substantial ground-based delivery, supported by recreational management hunts to target areas of known forest impacts. 45 to 55 hours of official control investment. Identifiable males will not be targeted.
III. Aoraki/Mount Cook and Westland Tai Poutini National Parks (Management Unit 4)	Less than 1/km² and a population of less than 500.		Recreational, guided, and commercial hunting. Official control as required to reduce to zero density targeting all tahr.	Explore additional opportunities for hunters to look for, shoot and report tahr. Continue structured recreational hunting opportunities.	Westland Tai Poutini National Park.	1 July 2024 to 30 June 2026.[3]	High priority for official control inside the feral range with a target of reducing tahr numbers to as close to zero density as practicable. AATH environmental offsets may be applied in addition to the official control, particularly in Westland Tai Poutini National Park. 75 to 85 hours of official control investment. Operations, including the distribution of AATH offsets and official control, to be optimised to reduce breeding populations. However, official control operations will control all tahr encountered (including identifiable males); official control to start from 4 August 2025. Some localised official control may be ground based.
IV. South Whitcombe/Wanganui/Whataroa (Management Unit 2)	2/km² and a population of 1,500.		Encourage increased recreational and guided hunting, then commercial recovery. Official control as required.	Encourage hunters to look for, shoot, and report tahr. Ballots in wilderness area.	No AATH within tahr ballot areas (Adams Wilderness Area) before conclusion of ballot.	1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026[3] outside the Adams Wilderness Area tahr ballot area. No recovery from within the Adams tahr ballot area during tahr ballot period. Carcass recovery to target nannies and juveniles only.	Aerial control to be delivered through a combination of AATH environmental offsets and official aerial control. Official control to include substantial ground-based delivery, to target areas of known forest impacts. Identifiable males will not be targeted. 15 to 25 hours of official control investment.
V. Ben Ohau (Management Unit 5)	2.5/km² and population of 1,800.		Encourage increased landowner control and recreational and guided hunting first, then commercial recovery. Official control as required.	Encourage hunters to look for, shoot, and report tahr.	No AATH in Ahuriri Conservation Park between 1 September 2025 and 1 May 2026.	1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026.[3] Carcass recovery to target nannies and juveniles only.	Aerial control to be delivered through AATH environmental offsets. Identifiable males will not be targeted.
VI. South Rakaia / Rangitata (Management Unit 1)	2.5/km² and a population of 2,000.		Encourage recreational hunting first, then guided hunting, then commercial recovery. Official control as required.	Encourage hunters to look for, shoot, and report tahr through hunter-led management.	No AATH in Te Kahui Kaupeka Conservation Park between 1 September 2025 and 1 May 2026. Activities to be integrated with hunter-led management where possible.	Potential for integration with hunter-led management to be explored.	Aerial control to be delivered through a combination of AATH environmental offsets and official aerial control, integrated with hunter-led management priorities. Identifiable males will not be targeted. Control specifically targeting mature females may be implemented on a trial basis. 5 to 15 hours of official control investment.
VII. Gammack/Two Thumb (Management Unit 3)	2/km² and a population of 3,000.		Encourage landowner control, increased recreational and guided hunting first, then commercial recovery. Official control as required.	Encourage hunters to look for, shoot, and report tahr. Explore structured recreational hunting opportunities.	No AATH in Te Kahui Kaupeka Conservation Park between 1 September 2025 and 1 May 2026.	1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026.[3] Carcass recovery to target nannies and juveniles only.	Aerial control to be delivered through AATH environmental offsets. Identifiable males will not be targeted.

1 Information presented here is based on permit conditions at the time of writing. Future changes to permit conditions may occur, in which case this plan should be updated.

2 Operational effort is specified in terms of hours of helicopter-based aerial hunting because this is the primary historic method for tahr control. However, the allocated effort may be delivered under this plan as a comparable investment in alternative methods (e.g. ground-based control).

3 Specific place- and/or date-based exclusions may apply within this period, including operational exclusions over Christmas and roar periods.

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