

Tahr Control Operational Plan: 1 July 2026 to 30 June 2027

Purpose

Outline an annual work plan supporting the goals of the Himalayan Tahr Management Policy 1991 and Himalayan Tahr Control Plan 1993 (HTCP).

Context

Previous Tahr Control Operational Plans¹ (TCOPs) and annual reports to the New Zealand Conservation Authority provide substantial context on tahr management and how it has progressed since 2019. 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 TCOPs and of monitoring tahr populations and impacts.

Contributions from members of the Tahr Plan Implementation Liaison Group (TPILG) have added substantial value in developing this plan. The TPILG is made up of representatives from hunting, conservation, outdoor recreation and farming stakeholder groups with an interest in tahr management. TPILG input came through written submissions and a meeting prior to the development of a draft of this plan, and then again through submissions and discussions on that draft.

Managing tahr is scientifically and logistically complex; implementing the adaptive management approach envisaged in the HTCP requires working flexibly and making decisions based on the best available information, within broader policy context. In 2026/27, the programme will gather new information and build on previous information, 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
- ▶ tahr management delivery through hunter-led initiatives.

Over 2026/27, the TPILG will enable key stakeholders to advise DOC and work together to enhance contributions to the HTCP implementation.

Scope

Included: This TCOP covers management of tahr from 1 July 2026 to 30 June 2027, 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 Aerially Assisted Trophy Hunting (AATH)
- ▶ contributions to implementing the HTCP on other land tenures
- ▶ research and monitoring relating to tahr.

Excluded: This document does not deal with:

- ▶ tahr control beyond 30 June 2027
- ▶ 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 DOC and TPILG members' priorities and available capacity.

Contributions to control

A suite of contributors will deliver measures to control tahr populations:

- ▶ Recreational hunting contributes substantially within the feral range. Hunting will be supported by initiatives including communication with hunting permit holders and ballots.
- ▶ The results of the New Zealand Game Animal Council's (GAC's) '2024/2025 Hunting Research Project' will be considered in the delivery of the 2026/27 TCOP (following results becoming available).
- ▶ Specific hunting initiatives will contribute control through management agreements, including:
 - ▶ increased management operations by the New Zealand Tahr Foundation (NZTF) in South Westland, building on their 5-year track record of delivering safe, substantial and cost-effective control
 - ▶ anticipated NZTF hunter-led management operations in Management Unit 1.
- ▶ Guided hunting, including AATH, will contribute in areas permitted by concessions. 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) directed by DOC.
- ▶ Commercial tahr carcass recovery may contribute over the year, as permitted by concessions – demand for commercial tahr recovery opportunities has been very low on PCL for many years due to economic barriers of the low meat yield from tahr and the costs of recovering them from remote terrain.
- ▶ DOC will work with land managers to implement control in important locations on other tenures.

Indicative levels of official control funded by DOC are provided in this plan. They will be refined throughout the season based on information including funding availability, external contributions to control, data on tahr populations, observations from DOC staff and others, and opportunities for operational efficiency.

Applying a flexible approach

DOC, together with the TPILG members, is committed to using the best available information, including insights from stakeholders. Since factors such as funding, operational delivery and weather can significantly affect planned work, a flexible approach is needed. To support adaptive decision making, DOC and the GAC will conduct a review of progress at approximately the mid-point of official aerial control operations inside the feral range and discuss any remaining control efforts.

Research and monitoring

In 2026/27, tahr monitoring will focus on:

- ▶ updating field measurements from variable area tussock grassland monitoring sites, continuing the process for a 5-yearly update of tussock grassland data to understand tahr browse impacts
- ▶ gaining a better understanding of tahr populations, including conducting a survey using the established helicopter method and, subject to results from a trial scheduled for 2025/26, an alternative fixed-wing aerial survey method that may be able to deliver greater coverage at lower cost.

The potential benefits of ecologically broader and/or more temporally responsive monitoring of tahr browsing impacts is acknowledged. This requires ongoing methodological development, which will be prioritised in future TCOPs as capacity allows.

Operational specifications

Total effort on public conservation land

DOC remains committed to delivering effective and efficient official control over 2026/27.

Acknowledging that other factors may require flexibility in operational decisions, the initial planned official control effort for 2026/27 is 230 to 260 hours of aerial search and control or equivalent official effort through other delivery methods. Substantial additional effort is planned through hunter-led operations delivered by NZTF and AATH offsets directed by DOC.

Of the 230 to 260 hours, an indicative total of 110 to 120 hours of search and control effort is allocated for operations outside the feral range.

The remaining 120 to 140 hours of official control effort are planned for operations inside the feral range, alongside a projected 8 to 10 hunter-led operations.

Projected official control effort is lower than recent years due to anticipated population and vegetation monitoring costs, as well as substantially increased operating costs (~17%). Ongoing uncertainty regarding fuel prices is reflected in the use of ranges for planned control effort, both at a management unit level and overall. Should additional official control resources become available during the year, their allocation will reflect the priorities outlined in this document.

Priorities for control for 2026/27

Priorities for this year are to:

- ▶ continue applying a strategic approach to official tahr control outside the feral range, with a focus on preventing expansions north/south and reducing the risk of tahr populations establishing in Fiordland, Mount Aspiring and Arthur's Pass National Parks
- ▶ take the Aoraki/Mount Cook and Westland Tai Poutini National Parks to the lowest practicable tahr density, with a primary focus on reducing the breeding 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
- ▶ within management units, target official control to the areas of highest tahr densities and/or impacts and/or where control presents challenges (e.g. wilderness areas and forest ecosystems).

Official control work in the feral range

- ▶ Official control data shall be published as online maps² once verified. AATH offset will also be published.
- ▶ Where practicable, official aerial control within the feral range will occur between 1 July and 13 November 2026 to avoid kid-drop and peak recreational use periods.
- ▶ Official control in more accessible areas of national parks will start from 3 August 2026, providing recreational and commercial hunters with additional time to hunt before this.
- ▶ DOC will work with AATH concessionaires to, where practicable, deliver environmental offsets between 1 July and 13 November 2026.
- ▶ Official ground-based control may occur between 1 July and 13 November 2026, and 1 February to 30 April 2027. In limited circumstances, aerial control may be used to support ground-based operations that occur from February to April.
- ▶ Control activities will consider recreational users. If recreational users are sighted, the control shall move to another location.
- ▶ No official aerial control will take place over a public holiday weekend.
- ▶ 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.

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

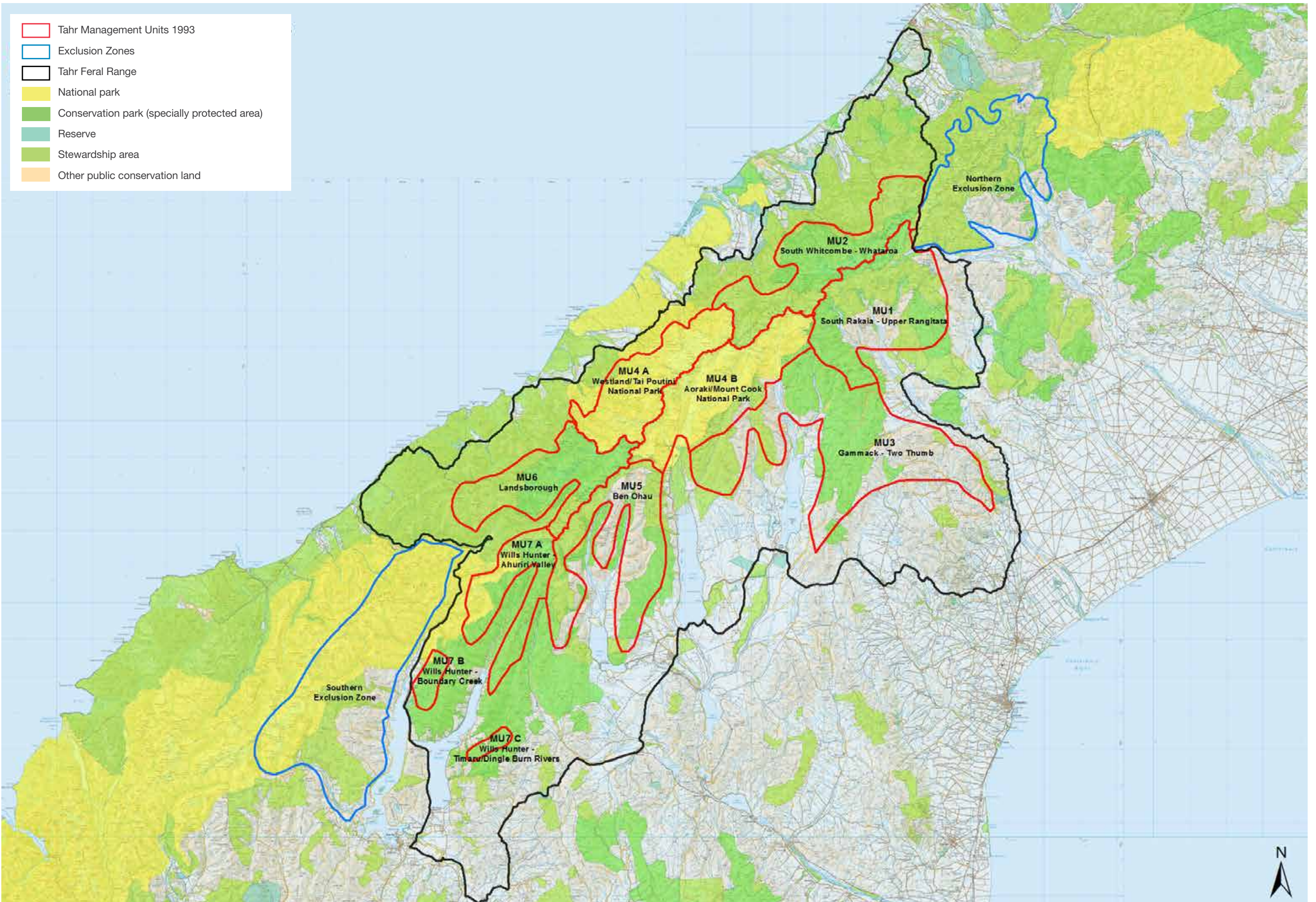


Figure 1: A map of the tahr feral range, including management units and exclusion zones.

Priority order of management unit in Himalayan Thar Control Plan 1993	Intervention levels of tahr per square kilometre (km ²) 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:			
				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 between 230 and 260 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.	<p>► Control tools will be applied adaptively throughout the season to optimise the cumulative effect of control from all sources.</p> <p>► Official control will prioritise preventing spread beyond the feral range, reducing towards zero density in national parks and targeting populations of higher density and/or where substantial impacts are observed.</p> <p>► Landowners with feral tahr will be encouraged to reduce densities to Himalayan Thar Control Plan 1993 targets.</p>			
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 2026 to 30 June 2027. ³ Carcass recovery to target nannies and juveniles only.	High priority for official aerial control and AATH environmental offsets in areas of higher density. 5 to 15 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/km ² and a population of less than 100.	Tahr densities not to exceed 5/km ² 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 2026 to 30 June 2027. 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. No planned hours of official control investment. Identifiable males will not be targeted.
II. Landsborough (Management Unit 6)	1.5/km ² 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 2026 to 30 June 2027 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. 30 to 45 hours of official control investment. Identifiable males will not be targeted. 3–5 hunter-led operations delivered by NZTF under their existing Community Agreement with DOC.
III. Aoraki/Mount Cook and Westland Tai Poutini National Parks (Management Unit 4)	Less than 1/km ² 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.	No AATH between 1 September 2026 and 14 June 2027 in Westland Tai Poutini National Park south of the Karangarua Range and Sierra Range ridgeline.	1 July 2026 to 30 June 2027. 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 official control, particularly in Westland Tai Poutini National Park. 50 to 60 hours of official control investment. Control likely to be delivered through a combination of aerial and ground-based operations. Official control will be targeted to reduce breeding populations. However, all tahr encountered (including identifiable males) will be controlled. Official control may commence during July in remote areas, with a delay up to 3 August 2026 in more accessible locations. 3–5 hunter-led operations delivered by NZTF under their existing Community Agreement with DOC.
IV. South Whitcombe/Wanganui/Whataroa (Management Unit 2)	2/km ² 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 2026 to 30 June 2027 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/km ² and a 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 2026 and 1 May 2027.	1 July 2026 to 30 June 2027. ³ Carcass recovery to target nannies and juveniles only.	Aerial control to be delivered through AATH environmental offsets. Identifiable males will not be targeted. 5 to 10 hours of official control investment.
VI. South Rakaia / Rangitata (Management Unit 1)	2.5/km ² 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 2026 and 1 May 2027. Integration of activities with hunter-led management to be explored.	1 July 2026 to 30 June 2027. ³ Carcass recovery to target nannies and juveniles only. 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. 0 to 5 hours of official control investment. 1–2 hunter-led operations delivered by the NZTF under a proposed Community Agreement with DOC. Identifiable males will not be targeted.
VII. Gammack / Two Thumb (Management Unit 3)	2/km ² 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 2026 and 1 May 2027.	1 July 2026 to 30 June 2027. 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.