



# Tahr Control Operational Plan: 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021 (reconsidered after consultation)

## Context

The Department of Conservation (DOC) and Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu (Ngāi Tahu) acknowledge their commitment to continuing to develop the Treaty partnership in relation to tahr management.

The first half of 2020 has been a unique period in New Zealand's history. The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown halted tahr hunting from March to early May. COVID-19 also prevented planned aerial surveys of tahr on Crown pastoral lease land. Access for international visitors is currently restricted, which will result in a significant reduction in 2020 in the total number of tahr shot from the commercial sector with a reduction of up to 300 trophies, as well as minimal environmental contributions from Aerially Assisted Trophy Hunters (AATH), (where five females/juveniles are shot for each trophy under an AATH concession). DOC understands that many commercial guides have had bookings deferred rather than cancelled, meaning that trophy hunting could rebound when borders open again. A reduced amount of Wild Animal Recovery Operations (WARO) can be expected over the coming year.

This revised plan replaces the operational plan approved on 30 June 2020. The consultation directed by the High Court has been completed and the resulting submissions considered in forming this plan. The court allowed 125 hours of aerial control within the management units to be completed during consultation and reconsideration of the plan.

## What's changed?

Following consideration of submissions, DOC has, amongst other things:

- ▶ Provided for a discussion on operational detail with the Game Animal Council (GAC) after half of the tahr control has been completed in the management units outside the national parks (MU4).

- ▶ Included an Operational Specifications section, including formalised assurances that control operations will avoid popular recreational hunting areas.
- ▶ Committed to urgency in beginning effective research and monitoring.
- ▶ Indicated it is likely to cease control in Wills/Makarora/Hunter (MU7) for 2020/21.

## Scope

**Included:** This document covers management of tahr from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021, including:

- ▶ Control of tahr on Public Conservation Land (PCL).
- ▶ Contributions from recreational and concession hunting, including guiding and WARO.
- ▶ Tahr surveys on Crown Pastoral Lease land.
- ▶ Research and monitoring relating to tahr.

**Projections for:**

- ▶ Official tahr control on PCL within and outside the feral range.

**Excluded:** This document does not deal with:

- ▶ Management of tahr control beyond 30 June 2021.
- ▶ Tahr farming.

## Contributions to control

A suite of contributors will control tahr on PCL, including within the management units and beyond the feral range. Due to matters noted in the Context above, tourism-based hunting and associated environmental contributions have been severely reduced. Domestic recreational and guided hunting, as well as WARO, will be encouraged, and official control will occur as required to move towards Himalayan Tahr Control Plan (HTCP) 1993 targets. Where practical, a trial using professional ground hunters may be included in official control.

- ▶ Recreational hunting can contribute to control within the feral range, though there remain places where recreational hunting is not practical. Hunting will be encouraged by ballots and the provision of information on observations of tahr. Guided hunting will contribute in areas permitted by concessions.
- ▶ AATH environmental contribution control can contribute as directed by DOC in areas of high tahr density. However, DOC anticipates this will not occur in 2020/21 (or at low levels compared with previous years). This has been taken into consideration when setting the level of official control.
- ▶ WARO may contribute throughout the tahr range over the year except in May and June (requires appropriate concessions to be applied for and issued for PCL). DOC anticipates WARO contributions will be negligible in 2020/21. This has been taken into consideration when setting the level of official control.
- ▶ Official control funded by DOC will contribute in national parks, where required throughout the management units, and extending beyond the feral range.

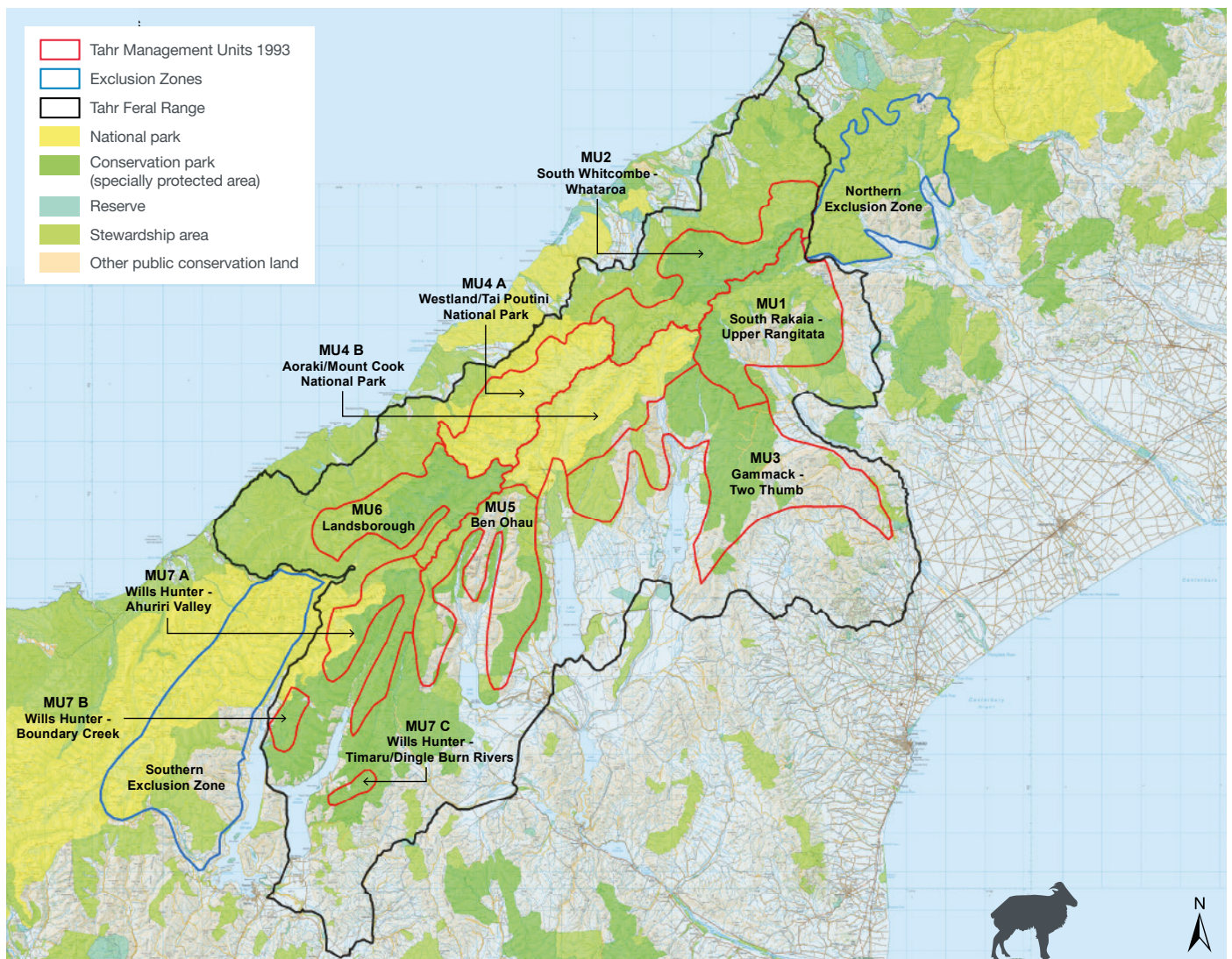
## Research and monitoring

DOC will work with Ngāi Tahu, researchers, and stakeholders to develop by 10 December 2020 an integrated tahr research and monitoring programme. The first step in designing this programme is well advanced and considers:

- ▶ Mātauranga Māori.
- ▶ Measuring tahr population dynamics and ecology across the whole feral range, including tahr off public conservation land.
- ▶ Tahr impacts on the alpine environment, including the relative impacts of tahr and overlapping introduced herbivores.
- ▶ Site-based management.
- ▶ Socio/economic value (positive and negative) of tahr.

There is likely to be more research and monitoring desirable than can be resourced. Priority for implementation in 2020/21 will be determined after engagement with tahr stakeholders and is likely to include gathering information on tahr populations and on impacts on the natural environment.

## Map of Tahr Management Units



## Operational specifications

### Total effort

Outside the feral range there will be approximately 145 hours of aerial control.

The 250 hours of control effort in the management units for 2020/21 was determined on the basis of population estimates undertaken in 2016–2019, data captured during the control programme over July–November 2019, and from observations by staff and contractors after last year's control. In consideration of the resources available to DOC, the total effort in official control for 2020/21 inside the feral range will not be more than 250 hours of aerial control. Based on information provided by submissions it is likely that no further search and control will be undertaken in Management Unit 7.

### Learning as we go

Consistent with the adaptive management approach of the HTCP 1993, DOC is committed to learning as it goes, using all available information, and taking into account the knowledge of stakeholders. To ensure optimal results, a learning step will be provided halfway through the official control programme. After the first 125 hours of aerial control in the management units, DOC will invite the Game Animal Council to a discussion on the operational results of control to date. This discussion will not include control in the national parks, where control will commence immediately following approval of this plan. DOC will consider the Council's advice in determining the operational detail of work for the remaining control effort outside of the National Park Management Unit (MU4).

This step will be undertaken with some urgency to allow official control to be completed by mid-November to avoid potential conflicts with hunting interests later in the financial year. The planned date for completion of the discussion is 10 days from approval of this plan. The primary purpose of this discussion will be to optimise operational effectiveness and efficiency in achieving the goals of the HTCP 1993. This may include identification of conditions for areas where control should be considered complete and from which resources can be re-allocated to areas of higher need.

## Priorities for control for 2020/21

Priorities for this year are to:

- ▶ Prevent spread from the feral range by controlling tahr in the exclusion zones to zero density and targeting other priority areas outside the feral range.

- ▶ Take the Aoraki/Mount Cook and Westland Tai Poutini National Parks to the lowest practicable density (noting that observations on tahr abundance and encounter rates per hour of aerial control will determine when control will cease, or the allocated hours are expended).
- ▶ Bring the population towards intervention levels in the HTCP 1993 by focusing on management units outside the national parks on localised areas of high tahr density, where tahr have mobbed up, and on hard-to-access areas, thus protecting natural values at particular places. Note, identifiable male tahr will not be targeted in management units (other than Management Unit 4, the national parks, where all tahr are targeted).
- ▶ Establish the status of tahr populations off public conservation land.

Note: As a principle, DOC will continue to reduce tahr populations per the HTCP 1993 utilising all available control methods. DOC will explore options to foster the efficacy of population reduction through recreational hunting, guided hunting, and commercial recovery. This will include options to extend the tahr ballot, options to improve hunter access, the provision of maps with information on bull sightings and easy-to-access areas with high tahr numbers, as well as communication with hunting permit holders.

## Standard requirements for tahr control work

During planning, DOC will identify all high use popular sites the public is likely to be utilising. DOC intends to avoid control in easily accessible recreational hunting locations.

## Control work in a Management Unit

- ▶ All helicopter operations will record data in a standardised way and meet DOC's minimum requirements for tahr control.
- ▶ These data will be made publicly available once verified.
- ▶ When control work is being undertaken, DOC or contractors will visually check road ends, huts, popular tracks, and if the public is encountered, move away from their location.
- ▶ If hunters are sighted, control will move to another location.
- ▶ No control work will be undertaken over a public holiday weekend.



## Tahr Control Operational Plan 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021

Priority order of Management Unit in Himalayan Thar Control Plan 1993	Intervention levels of tahr/ km <sup>2</sup> 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	Wild Animal Recovery Operators	Official control on public conservation land including contract aerial control
Outside feral range.	Eliminate spread.	Control all tahr.	Official control incorporating ground surveillance in critical areas.	Encourage reporting of sightings and tahr controlled.			Reduce tahr populations to as close to zero density as practicable. Approximately 145 hours of search and aerial control.
I. Wills/Makarora Hunter (Management Unit #7).	<1/km <sup>2</sup> and population of <100.	Tahr densities not to exceed 5/km <sup>2</sup> for any localised area.  Female-kid groups to be restricted, especially in close proximity to unit boundaries, to 10 or fewer per group.  Recreational and commercial hunting encouraged, official control where not within set levels.	Encourage increased recreational hunting and commercial hunting. Official control to remove all nanny and kid groups over 10.	Encourage hunters to look for, shoot, and report tahr.	Ground hunting throughout period. AATH per dates and locations in concession.	WARO 1 July 2020 – 30 April 2021 nannies and juveniles only.	Likely no further search and control to be undertaken. Approximately 20 hours was allocated for the full operational year. As at 31 August about 3 hours of control have been completed.
II. Landsborough (Management Unit #6).	1.5/km <sup>2</sup> and population of 900.		Encourage increased recreational hunting, guided hunting, and commercial hunting. Official control to remove all nanny and kid groups over 10.	Encourage hunters to look for, shoot, and report tahr. Ballots in Wilderness Area.	Ground hunting throughout period. AATH per dates and locations in concession.	WARO 1 July 2020 – 30 April 2021 nannies and juveniles only.	Apply approximately 40 hours for the full operational year. May change after reviewing control already completed in 2020. As at 31 August about 20 hours of control have been completed.
III. Aoraki/Mt Cook and Westland/ Tai Poutini National Parks (Management Unit #4).	<1/km <sup>2</sup> and population of <500.		Recreational hunting, guided hunting, and commercial hunting; official control as required to reduce to zero density targeting all tahr.	Encourage hunters to look for, shoot, and report tahr.	Ground hunting throughout period. AATH per dates and locations in concession.	WARO 1 July 2020 – 30 April 2021.	Apply up to 110 hours of control for the full operational year. As at 31 August about 55 hours of control have been completed.
IV. South Whitcombe/ Wanganui/ Whataroa (Management Unit #2).	2/km <sup>2</sup> and population of 1500.		Encourage increased recreational hunting and guided hunting first, then commercial recovery. Official control to remove all nanny and kid groups >10.	Encourage hunters to look for, shoot, and report tahr. Ballots in Wilderness Area.	Ground hunting throughout period. AATH per dates and locations in concession.	WARO 1 July 2020 – 30 April 2021 nannies and juveniles only.	Apply approximately 25 hours for the full operational year. May change after reviewing control already completed in 2020. As at 31 August about 13 hours of control have been completed.
V. Ben Ohau (Management Unit #5).	2.5/km <sup>2</sup> and population of 1800.		Encourage increased landowner control and recreational hunting and guided hunting first, then commercial recovery. Official control to remove all nanny and kid groups >10.	Encourage hunters to look for, shoot, and report tahr.	Ground hunting throughout period. AATH per dates and locations in concession.	WARO 1 July 2020 – 30 April 2021 nannies and juveniles only.	Apply approximately 10 hours for the full operational year. Consider increasing control in difficult to access/ high density areas above the planned 10 hours after reviewing control already completed in 2020. As at 31 August about 5 hours of control have been completed.
VI. South Rakaia/ Rangitata (Management Unit #1).	2.5/km <sup>2</sup> and population of 2000.		Encourage increased recreational hunting first, then guided hunting, then commercial recovery. Official control to remove all nanny and kid groups >10.	Encourage hunters to look for, shoot, and report tahr.	Ground hunting throughout period. AATH per dates and locations in concession.	WARO 1 July 2020 – 30 April 2021 nannies and juveniles only.	Apply approximately 25 hours for the full operational year. May change after reviewing control already completed in 2020. As at 31 August about 12 hours of control have been completed.
VII. Gammack/ Two Thumb (Management Unit #3).	2.0/km <sup>2</sup> and population of 3,000.		Landowner control (on lease or private land); recreational hunting and guided hunting; commercial hunting; official control as required adjacent to park boundary.	Encourage hunters to look for, shoot, and report tahr.	Ground hunting throughout period. AATH as per dates and locations in concession.	WARO 1 July 2020 – 30 April 2021 nannies and juveniles only.	Approximately 20 hours of search and control focusing on high density and female-kid groups (see above) and adjacent to the national park boundary. Identifiable males will not be targeted. Ground-based hunting considered <sup>1</sup> . As at 31 August about 11 hours of control have been completed.

<sup>1</sup> If ground-based contract hunting is implemented, hours of aerial search and control will be reduced.