

Tahr Control Operational Plan: 1 July 2021 – 30 June 2022

Context

This plan has been informed by the results of tahr control operations over 2020/21¹ and contributions from members of the Tahr Plan Implementation Liaison Group (TPILG). Over the coming year the TPILG will continue to provide for effective collaboration amongst parties with interests in tahr management. This will include advising the Department of Conservation (DOC) and working together to enhance contributions to tahr management.

The last year has been a difficult time for many, with ongoing COVID-19 travel restrictions disabling much international tourism and creating a huge draw on Government resources to sustain the wellbeing of the community. It seems probable that ongoing effects of COVID-19 will remain in play for the 2021/22 year. The commitment of all parties to effective management of tahr remains strong, and Government commitment to the tahr programme has not changed.

Longer-term management will be shaped by the results of new research and ongoing and new monitoring. This will improve understanding of both control parameters, such as the effects of controlling fewer males than females, and the effects of tahr densities and herd sizes in different environments. Anecdotal observations of male-biased herds may reflect localised effects of control in recent years. Wider observations suggest that the overall herd may not be significantly male biased and further monitoring, undertaken in autumn 2021, will improve understanding of this issue. High numbers of tahr remain in some locations, particularly on the West Coast where ground hunting may be a useful additional control measure.

Scope

Included: This document covers management of tahr from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022, including:

- ▶ Control of tahr on Public Conservation Land (PCL).
- ▶ Contributions from recreational and concession hunting, including guiding and Wild Animal Recovery Operations (WARO).
- ▶ Contributions to tahr management on land tenures other than PCL.
- ▶ 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 2022.
- ▶ Tahr farming.

Contributions to control

A suite of contributors will deliver measures to control populations of tahr. Tourism-based hunting and associated environmental contributions are expected to remain severely reduced compared with the pre-COVID-19 period. Domestic recreational and guided hunting and WARO will continue to contribute. Official control will occur as required to move towards Himalayan Tahr Control Plan 1993 (HTCP) targets. The intent is to pilot the use of professional ground hunters as part of official control.

- ▶ Recreational hunting can contribute within the feral range, though there remain places where recreational hunting is not a practical control option. Hunting will be encouraged by ballots, emails to recreational hunting permit holders, and the provision of information on observations of tahr.
- ▶ Guided hunting will contribute in areas permitted by concessions.
- ▶ Aerially Assisted Trophy Hunting (AATH) environmental contribution control may contribute as directed by DOC in areas of high tahr density (due to COVID-19 we anticipate a low contribution to tahr control).
- ▶ Commercial WARO may contribute over the year, except from May to early July (these require appropriate concessions to be applied for and issued for PCL).
- ▶ Official control funded by DOC will continue in national parks, where required throughout the management units and feral range, and beyond the feral range.

Research and monitoring

Development and implementation of research and monitoring will continue for 2021/22. This will include DOC's own planned programme, collaborative programmes, and facilitating the work of others to:

- ▶ Analyse data from aerial surveys completed in Management Units 1 and 3 in autumn 2021.
- ▶ Continue remeasurement of historic vegetation plots.
- ▶ Analyse spatial data on tahr, hunting and ecological values.
- ▶ Potentially undertake further tahr counts in specific management units.
- ▶ Implement a programme to look at vegetation condition in relation to different densities of tahr.

Operational specifications

Total effort on Public Conservation Land

Total control effort for 2021/22 will be less than in the 2019/20 or 2020/21 financial years.

Outside the feral range there will be a total of approximately 120 hours of aerial search and control. In addition to helicopter control effort, DOC will also look at the potential of searches using fixed-wing aircraft and ground-based surveillance and control.

A total of approximately 175 hours of control effort in the management units for 2021/22 was determined based on data and observations from work in 2020 and contributions from stakeholders.

Control will be focused where population densities are high, e.g. on the West Coast.

An additional 20 hours of control effort will be provided for areas within the feral range but outside the management units defined in the HTCP to reduce risk of breeding populations spreading.

Use of ground control will be piloted in forest and scrub, likely in Management Unit 6 and in the south of the feral range.

Targeting

General provisions for targeting in official control are given below. These will be refined during operations planning, drawing on expertise from within and outside of DOC.

- ▶ Tahr that could extend the feral range will be targeted as a high priority (e.g. in areas within the feral range but outside the management units) as they may contribute to source populations outside the feral range.
- ▶ All tahr (including identifiable males) will be targeted in the national park management unit (Management Unit 4), and outside the feral range.
- ▶ Identifiable males will not be targeted in Management Units 2, 3, 5, and 6 (noting no control is planned in 1 & 7), nor outside the management units but inside the feral range. Subject to the above, groups of 10 or more tahr will be targeted wherever they are found.

Learning as we go

At DOC, we are committed to learning as we go, using available information, including consideration of stakeholder knowledge. This approach will be enhanced over coming years as better data become available and longer-term planning and management are enabled.

Approximately halfway through the official control hours period, a review will be carried out to ensure optimal use of the remaining control effort. This review will involve the Game Animal Council.

Results of surveys of tahr on pastoral leases will be considered as they become available during 2021. This information may result in additional management actions following engagement with LINZ and leaseholders.

To enhance opportunities for collaborative learning and advance understanding on key issues of common concern, DOC intends to establish three working groups for 2021/22. These will be focused on:

- ▶ Longer-term operational planning.
- ▶ Optimising control outside the feral range.
- ▶ Determining how the hunting sector can take a lead in tahr management at specific locations, initially focusing on Management Unit 1.

¹ See <https://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/things-to-do/hunting/what-to-hunt/tahr/tahr-control-operations/>



Priorities for control for 2021/22

Priorities for this year are to:

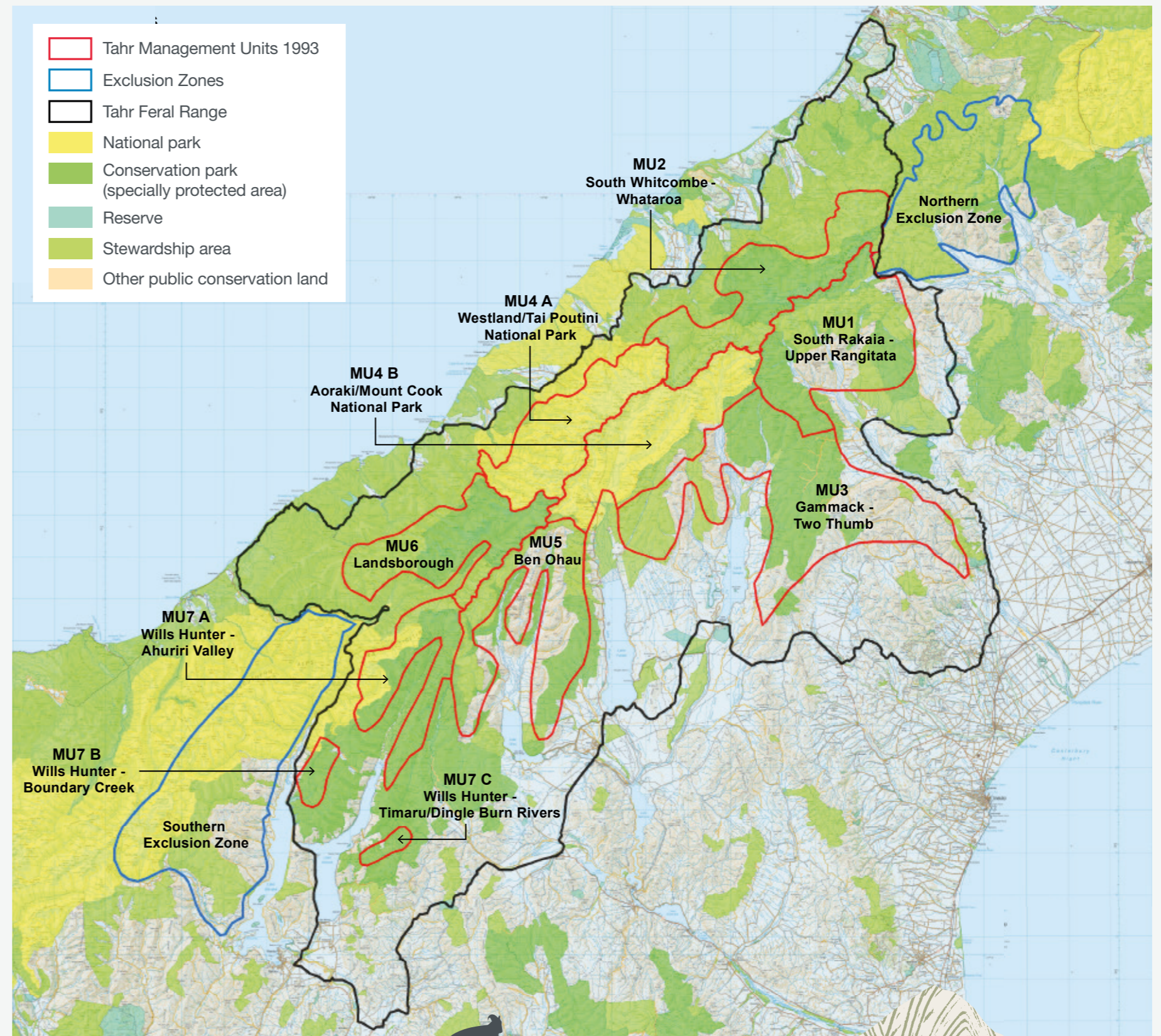
- ▶ Target all tahr outside the feral range.
- ▶ Prevent spread from the feral range by removing tahr in:
 - the exclusion zones (all tahr), and
 - areas within the feral range outside the management units near the feral range boundary (identifiable males will not be targeted).
- ▶ Take the Aoraki/Mount Cook and Westland Tai Poutini National Parks to the lowest practicable tahr density (noting that control will cease once allocated hours are expended or if observations on tahr abundance and encounter rates per hour of aerial control suggest that earlier cessation is appropriate).
- ▶ Bring the tahr population towards intervention levels in the HTCP; focusing the control in management units outside the national parks on localised areas of high tahr density, where tahr have mobbed up, and on hard-to-access areas to protect natural values at places. Note that identifiable male tahr will not be targeted in management units other than in Management Unit 4 (the national parks).
- ▶ Continue to reduce tahr populations on the West Coast.
- ▶ Control in areas where high impacts are occurring, or where recreational hunting is unlikely to be active. The Department of Conservation has sought contributions from stakeholders to assist with identifying focus areas.

Note: As a principle, DOC will continue to enable reduction of tahr populations per the HTCP utilising all available control methods. This will include exploring options to foster the efficacy of population reduction through recreational hunting, guided hunting and commercial recovery by supporting increased hunter participation and effectiveness (this will include the provision of information on maps of identifiable male sightings, easy-to-access areas with high numbers, and communication with hunting permit holders).

Control work in the feral range

- ▶ All helicopter operations shall record data in a standardised way and meet the DOC's minimum requirements for tahr control.
- ▶ Control data shall be made publicly available once verified (as per previous years).
- ▶ No control or WARO will be carried out May and June 2022, or in ballot areas until 12 July 2021 to avoid conflict with the extended ballot period.
- ▶ Control will be focused in less-accessible areas. Control will also avoid areas in close proximity to huts popular with tahr hunters. If hunters on foot are sighted, control shall move to another location.
- ▶ No control work shall be undertaken over a public holiday weekend.
- ▶ The Department of Conservation will advise when control activity has been completed for the year in a management unit.

Map of Tahr Management Units



Priority order of management unit in Himalayan Thar Control Plan 1993	Intervention levels of tahr/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	WARO operators	Official control, including contract aerial control. Up to 30 hunting-days of ground-based control will be trialled in appropriate areas (see below).	
Outside feral range	Eliminate spread.	Control all tahr.		Official control incorporating ground surveillance in critical areas.	Encourage reporting of sightings and tahr controlled.			Approximately 120 hours of search and control. Control targets all tahr.	
1. Wills/Makarora Hunter (Management Unit 7)	<1/km ² and population of <100	Tahr densities not to exceed 5/km ² 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 recreational hunting and commercial hunting.	Encourage hunters to look for, shoot and report tahr.	Ground hunting throughout period. AATH per dates and locations in concession.	WARO 1 July 2021 – 30 April 2022, nannies and juveniles only.	No official control this year.
2. Landsborough (Management Unit 6)	1.5/km ² and population of 900				Encourage increased recreational hunting, guided hunting and commercial hunting. 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 12 July 2021 – 30 April 2022, nannies and juveniles only. Note: ballot exclusion.	Approximately 40 hours of search and control with a focus on removing female-kid groups. Identifiable males will not be targeted. Ground-based control trial site.
3. Aoraki/Mt Cook and Westland/Tai Poutini National Parks (Management Unit 4)	<1/km ² 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 2021 – 30 April 2022.	Approximately 90 hours of search and control with the majority of control focused on Westland/ Tai Poutini National Park. Control targets all tahr.
4. South Whitcombe/ Wanganui/Whataroa (Management Unit 2)	2/km ² 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 Areas.	Ground hunting throughout period. AATH per dates and locations in concession.	WARO 12 July 2021 – 30 April 2022, nannies and juveniles only. Note: ballot exclusion.	Approximately 25 hours of search and control with a focus on removing female-kid groups. Identifiable males will not be targeted.
5. Ben Ohau (Management Unit 5)	2.5/km ² 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 2021 – 30 April 2022, nannies and juveniles only.	Approximately 10 hours of search and control with a focus on the parts of the Ben Ohau range where tahr numbers remain relatively high, and where recreational hunters have limited effect due to difficult access. Identifiable males will not be targeted.
6. South Rakaia/Rangitata (Management Unit 1)	2.5/km ² and population of 2000				Encourage recreational hunting first, then guided hunting, then commercial recovery.	Encourage hunters to look for, shoot and report tahr.	Ground hunting throughout period. AATH per dates and locations in concession.	No WARO	No official control this year.
7. Gammack/Two Thumb (Management Unit 3)	2/km ² and population of 3000				Encourage landowner control, 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.	Ground hunting throughout period. AATH as per dates and locations in concession.	WARO 1 July 2021 – 30 April 2022, nannies and juveniles only.	Approximately 10 hours of search and control with a focus on the parts of the area where tahr numbers remain relatively high, where buffers are required and where recreational hunters have limited effect due to difficult access. Identifiable males will not be targeted.
Inside feral range but outside the management units close to feral range boundaries	No current target	Intent is to constrain breeding.		Encourage recreational, commercial and landowner control. Official control to remove all but recognisable male tahr.	Encourage hunters to look for, shoot and report tahr.	Ground hunting throughout period. AATH as per dates and locations in concession.	WARO 1 July 2021 – 30 April 2022, nannies and juveniles only.	Approximately 20 hours of search and control. Identifiable males will not be targeted. Ground-based control trial site.	