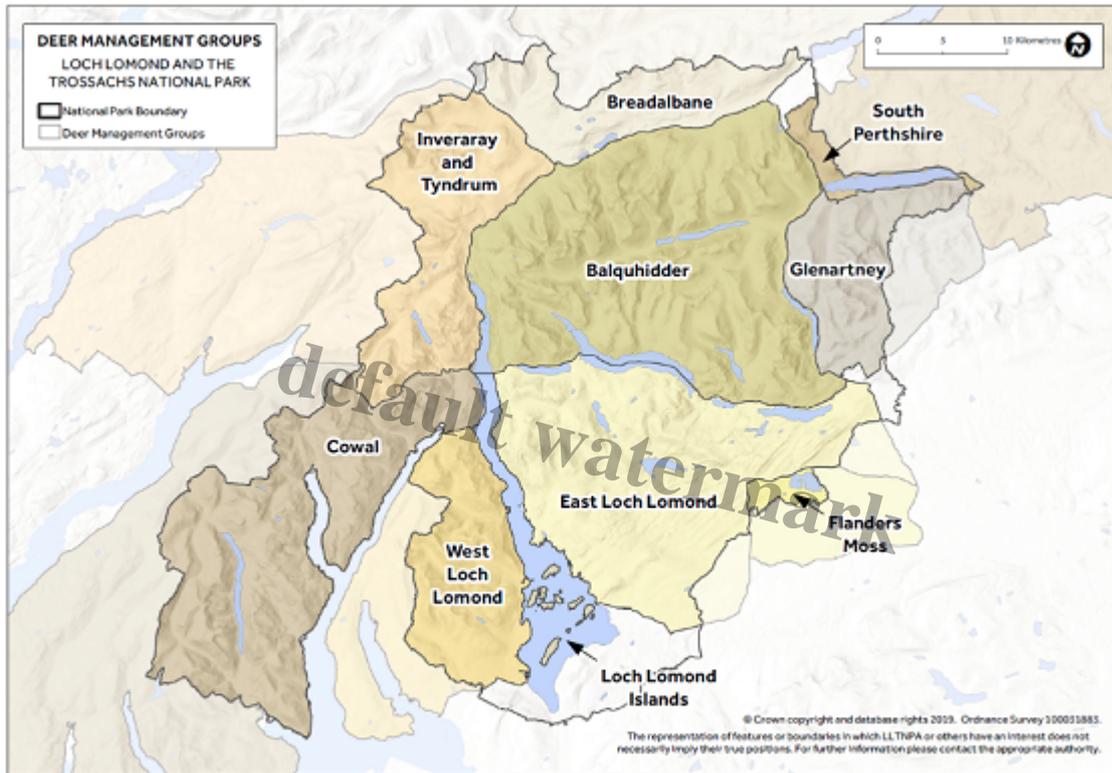


## Deer management in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park

### Description



This map shows the different groups and the areas they cover in the National Park.

The LLTNPA has not just made information about deer management plans public, its done so in a way that makes them as accessible as possible. Go to the website, click on the map and you go to the deer management information for that area. Good stuff!

After the criticisms in my last post of the lack of transparency in the planning system, its nice to report that in other areas the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority is showing signs of improvement. The LLTNPA's recent publication of Deer Management Plans for the area is particularly welcome. The impact of deer is the single most important conservation issue that the LLTNPA and Forest and Land Scotland, as the largest landowner in the area, need to tackle. Its also topical given the media coverage in the last few days about how high deer numbers are preventing woodland regeneration.

### Transparency about how landed estates are managing deer

Eleven months ago after I had appealed to the Information Commissioner the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority was ordered to release much of the information it held on estate Land Management Plans ([see here for issues](#)). Unfortunately those plans that had been drawn up were generally poor and contained no useful information on deer management.

The Deer Management Plans which have now been published ([see here](#)) are a step in the right direction but generally they still don't report what individual landowners have been doing to control deer numbers. There are exceptions which show this information does not need to be withheld from the public:

## Loch Lomond Islands Deer Management Plan 2019-24

### Appendix 4 – Breakdown of Cull Results

2018/19	Total	Bucks	Does	Fawns		2013/14	Total	Bucks	Does	Fawns
Luss Estate	22	11	8	3		Luss Estate	18	11	7	0
NNR islands	6	3	3	0		NNR islands	13	3	7	3
Inchfad	0	0	0	0		Inchfad	0	0	0	0
Inchcruin	0	0	0	0		Inchcruin	0	0	0	0
Inchmurrin	0	0	0	0		Inchmurrin	0	0	0	0
East Mainland	0	0	0	0		East Mainland	1	0	1	0
2017/18	Total	Bucks	Does	Fawns		2012/13	Total	Bucks	Does	Fawns
Luss Estate	24	11	13	0		Luss Estate	6	3	3	0
NNR islands	9	3	4	2		NNR islands	8	2	4	2
Inchfad	0	0	0	0		Inchfad	0	0	0	0
Inchcruin	0	0	0	0		Inchcruin	0	0	0	0
Inchmurrin	0	0	0	0		Inchmurrin	0	0	0	0
East Mainland	0	0	0	0		East Mainland	9	4	3	2

Extract from table for Loch Lomond islands showing the absence of any deer culls on some of the islands

The Plan reveals that on Inchfad the deer density is one of the highest in Scotland, equivalent to 86 deer per square kilometre and that reduction in deer numbers there is the priority. However, one suspect that the only reason this information has been published is that the private landowner concerned is now keen to co-operate (well done them!).

In other areas, however, cull information is notable for the way it is NOT broken down by landholding.. This plays into the hands of the landowners who are not co-operating to bring deer numbers down and are at the root of the deer problem.

### The deer problem and east Loch Lomond

In the Herald Magazine on Saturday there was an excellent article on *Scotland's secret rainforests*, the Atlantic influenced woodland that COULD be covering much of the National Park.

Kate Holl, the Woodland Adviser for SNH, explained why its been reduced to a few remnants:

It's simple. It's because we have higher herbivore numbers than pretty much anyway else in Europe.

This theme was repeated yesterday in the Ferret's coverage ([see here](#)) of the new Scottish Environment LINK Report [Managing Deer for Climate, Communities and Conservation](#). Again the message is simple, habitats and the species that depend on them are being destroyed by deer because landowners have failed to control their numbers. This has had many knock on effects for years and is the single most important factor which will affect the Scottish Government's ability to meet its woodland expansion targets ([see here](#)). To illustrate the scale of the problem Mike Daniels from the John Muir Trust quotes the great ecologist Frank Fraser Darling who 50 years ago said there should be 60,000 red deer in Scotland - there are now nearer 400,000. The case for action couldn't be clearer.

So what does the Deer Management Plan for east Loch Lomond tell us there about how deer there are being managed?

Part of the answer to that, as the Plan shows, is that there has been NO plan until recently. The Deer Management Group collapsed in 2002 and has now been replaced by an East Loch Lomond Land Management Forum (ELLMF) which covers a rather different area. While Forest and Land Scotland is by far the largest landowner in the area, production of the Deer Management Plan has been left to frontline staff from the LLTNPA and Scottish Natural Heritage. They appears to have done a very good job given the constraints in which they operate of publishing what information they can.

Map 2: LMF Boundary



Forestry and Land Scotland owns a large proportion of land in the area

Unfortunately, basic information on what Forest and Land Scotland has done to manage deer is missing from the report - FLS don't even report the size of their landholding unlike other

landowners in the Forum though I suspect they have better data than any other landowner. Moreover, while there are references to high deer culls by FLS in the past, particularly along the east shores of Loch Lomond, more detailed culling information which would enable one to understand WHERE FLS is now culling deer is missing.

To illustrate why this is important, part of FLS's landholding is around Loch Ard, where there were a large number of landslips following the downpour of 4th August. The number of deer that have been culled there in the last 20 years, say, might just have a bearing on WHY these landslips occurred.



Landslip Strathard 2019 – it's quite possible of course that the FLS has successfully been carrying out culls of deer in this area for so long that hardly any are left but if that is the case, why not say so?

Instead of reporting numbers for each landholding, the Plan summarises data from the statutory returns that each landowner has to make to SNH on the number of deer they have culled:

Table 3: Cull Returns from LMF Members

Year	Red				Roe				Sika
	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Total	Bucks	Does	Kids	Total	Total
2014-15	294	373	236	903	171	183	88	442	
2015-16	313	261	220	794	132	144	95	371	
2016-17	316	334	215	865	115	158	102	375	
2017-18	547	553	302	1402	198	250	134	582	
2018-19	388	458	261	1107	158	210	137	505	1

Over the last 5 years, 95% of the Red Deer cull within the LMF area has been achieved Land Scotland (FLS).

Table 4: Cull Returns for the Landholdings which are not yet part of the LMF

Year	Red				Roe				Sika
	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Total	Bucks	Does	Kids	Total	Total
2014-15	33	40	13	86	3	3	1	7	
2015-16	16	15	8	39	1	1	2	4	
2016-17	7	6	3	16	0	1	0	1	
2017-18	30	10	6	46	4	7	2	13	
2018-19	15	0	0	15	0	1	1	2	1

The table above displays cull data for landholdings within the LMF boundary which do but they have not yet joined the LMF. Appendix A has a map showing the locations of landholdings.

With FLS culling 95% of Red Deer, this absence of transparency clearly protects private and conservation landowners in the area: its impossible to tell which of the other 11 members of the ELLLMF culled any deer at all. Not all should have. The Forum includes among its member two holiday cottage businesses, Frenich Farm and Blairhullichan, both of which are about 20 ha and are presumably concerned about how deer eat any trees they plant.

That FLS at present is responsible for culling 95% of the Red Deer, however, does not mean they are doing enough. This is illustrated by the information in the report on the condition of designated sites in the area.

Table 2 displays the results of WHIA conducted at the Designated Sites within the

Designated Site	2008	2015	2017	2018
Fairy Knowe	L/M	H	M	N/A
Doon Hill	L/M	H	N/A	H
Drumore Wood	N/A	M/H	N/A	M
Craig Royston Wood	N/A	H	N/A	N/A
Rowardennan Salloch	N/A	L/M	N/A	N/A
Rowardennan Cashel	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Rowardennan (Northern Strip)	N/A	VH	N/A	N/A
Conic Hill	L	L/M	N/A	N/A
Gartfarran Woods	N/A	N/A	N/A	H

\*Conic Hill's Oak woodland was scored as Low (Pass) but the Wet woodland was M

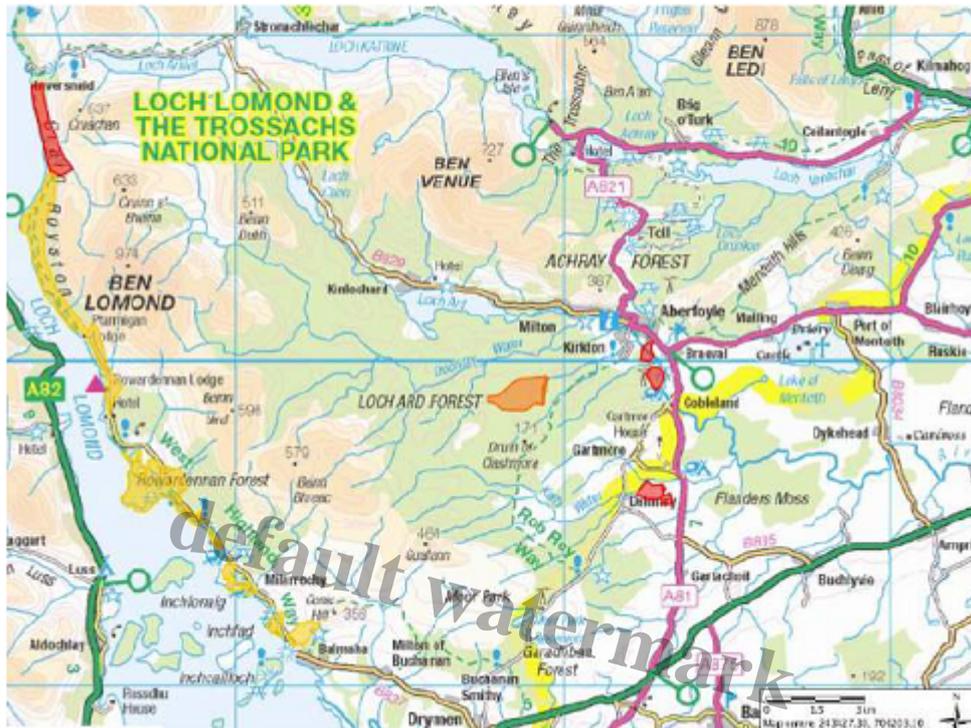
Only a score of 'Low' is considered acceptable. Therefore, all designated sites have

WHIA = Woodland Herbivore Impact Assessment

This effectively tells you that three of these designated sites are literally being destroyed by overgrazing. Being in a National Park too clearly makes very little difference.

The accompanying map shows that all ten of these sites either lie on or close to land managed by FLS, which is ultimately owned by the public:

Map 3: HIA results of the designated sites within the LMF boundary.  
The map below can be updated with results of future HIA at each landholding.



Red indicates high levels of herbivore impacts, amber medium and yellow low

It also suggests that FLS has been significantly better at managing deer numbers along much of the east shore of Loch Lomond, as part of the restoration of Atlantic oakwoods, than it has in the Loch Ard and Loch Achray Forests where industrial scale timber production pre-dominates. Within this context the high impact of herbivore grazing on the northern part of Craig Royston woods is partly attributable to the high numbers of goats found there.

Analysis is further complicated by the landowners who have not yet joined the ELL LMF

Map 2: Landholdings who do control deer, but are not yet part of LMF.

Landholdings not yet part of the LMF (but they control deer)



Why transparency is so important!

(As an aside, it may not surprise regular readers that neither Ledard Farm, owned by former Board Member Fergus Wood ([see here for latest](#)) nor the Drumlean Estate ([see here](#)) have joined the ELLLMF. The message: that landowners who find it hard to welcome walkers are usually the worst at conservation too).

The map shows a cluster of non-member farms south of Aberfoyle close to the cluster of designated sites in poor condition. The problem is that without the publication of numbers of deer culled, its impossible for the public to see which landowners, whether public or private, are failing to play their part

This is not an accident. The publication of such data would make it much easier for public authority staff, such as the two who have drawn up this plan, to state publicly where action is needed.

The voluntary approach to deer management will probably never work, but neither it nor a compulsory system CAN ever work until basic information of how many deer are being culled by each landholding is made public (FOI requests to follow!).

Deer management in the National Park should be quite simple and focussed on upping the numbers of deer culled by each landowner. Instead frontline staff are forced into endless attempts at voluntary negotiations with landowners with both hands tied behind their back. The Plan for east Loch Lomond states that in future culls are to be based on further Herbivore Impact Assessments conducted by landowners! There is some hope of that ever happening and the consequence is that nothing is planned and nothing will happen:

At present, HIA results are not available for all landholdings; this is the information that we need to tailor our cull efforts. In the meantime, whilst we wait on the HIA updates, it is suggested that each landholding continues to cull at least as many deer as it has currently done in recent years.

That's all the landholdings that have failed to cull deer off the hook!

There will be further consequences, not just for the natural environment but for humans driving round in their cars (there is almost no public transport in the area):

### **10.3. Current Delivery**

The B837 road from Drymen leads towards Rowardennan and Ben Lomond, and it runs parallel to the Eastern bank of the loch. This road can be extremely busy during the summer months with tourist but there have only been 14 DVC's since 2005; averaging 1 per year.

A very short section of the A811 Glasgow to Stirling road runs along the South Eastern boundary. Since 2005 there have only been 7 DVC's.

The A81 Balfron to Aberfoyle road runs along the Eastern boundary has had 6 DVC's.

The A821 Aberfoyle to Brig O' Turk road runs along the North Eastern edge of the park and has had 7 DVC's since 2005.

The B829 Aberfoyle to Stronachlachar road, which runs past Loch Ard towards Loch Lomond, only had 2 DVC's in since 2005.

DVC =Deer Vehicle Collisions (DVCs). Its not clear when its stated that some of these roads have a low number of DVCs what the comparison is. Only 14 DVCs on the Rowardennan Rd, which is a low number of deer because walkers on the West Highland Way scare them away apparently, sounds pretty serious.

Unfortunately, despite all the documented damage to the natural environment and to people, nothing ever appears to provide a sufficient reason to force landowners to reduce the numbers of deer.

## **What next to tackle the deer problem in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park**

This post has used the Deer Management Plan for east Loch Lomond to show that the current plans to tackle deer numbers in this area are totally inadequate. That should be a cause of concern, shame and embarrassment to the public authorities responsible, Forestry and Land Scotland, SNH and the LLTNPA.

The problem is not the frontline staff concerned, who appear to be doing their best, but the system in which they are forced to operate. Large amounts of effort go into delivering almost no change on the ground. Indeed in some areas the impact of deer continues to get worse.

The publication for Deer Management Plans across the National Park should nevertheless be seen as a very positive initiative. The east Loch Lomond Plan shows how they might help promote informed debate (ParksWatch will consider the Plans of other Deer Management Groups in due course) and could be used by local communities suffering from high deer numbers. The Plans are a necessary step for ALL landowners to be held to account. Their use, however, will be strictly limited until the LLTNPA and SNH insist that the cull data for ALL landholdings is made public as a matter of course.

Unfortunately, while the introduction to the LLTNPA's webpages on Deer Management is quite sensible, it is then undermined by the aims which the Park appears to have adopted:

*Deer management, based on sound ecological principles, is an essential part of managing land in a sustainable way. It is mainly the impact of deer that land managers are concerned with, rather than the actual number of deer. It is important that numbers of deer are not allowed to increase to levels where there is an adverse effect on their welfare or their habitat [Comment: we are well past that stage]. Deer belong to no-one and therefore represent a shared resource for the people of Scotland. The right to control and manage deer, however, is held by the owner of the land upon which they cross. Deer range over land ownership boundaries and it is through the Deer Management Groups in the Park that land managers work together to manage the deer collaboratively.*

This conceptual framework could have provided for an approach such as is being taken at Glen Feshie, where deer numbers have been continuously reduced with spectacular results. However, the LLTNPA then precludes such an approach in the first two aims it states it has adopted for working with Deer Management Groups (it is not clear where these were agreed):

- A mosaic of deer densities allowing different deer management objectives to be achieved in different parts of the Park* • **Comment:** so how can one area have high deer density and the next low deer densities when deer respect no boundaries? This is not just daft, it is totally inappropriate for a National Park which is supposed to put conservation first.
- A deer management planning process which seeks agreement from all interested parties on what deer densities should be* • **Comment:** again, this is an impossible objective, as demonstrated by the numbers of landholdings which are not even members of the east Loch Lomond Land Management Forum.

These two aims just play into the hands of landowners.

The LLTNPA's publication of Deer Management Plans for the National Park provides further convincing evidence that, whatever the efforts of frontline staff, it will get nowhere until a regulatory approach is taken as in other countries.

## Category

- Loch Lomond and Trossachs

## Tags

1. CNPA
2. conservation
3. Deer
4. landed estates
5. LLTNPA
6. natural environment
7. scottish natural heritage

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