Summary Update
July 2023

TWWHA Deer Control Project – Mid Project Update

Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area - Deer Control Project Update 2023

The Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) has undertaken the first of two eradication and control efforts of wild fallow deer in the Walls of Jerusalem National Park (WoJNP) and adjacent bordering areas of the Central Plateau Conservation Area (CPCA). This summary report provides an update on progress so far.

Background

PWS applied for and was successful in acquiring a $400,000 Australian Heritage Grant from the Australian Government to survey for and eradicate wild fallow deer from the WoJNP and surrounding reserves using thermal technology. The project is known as the TWWHA Deer Control Project.

The project goal is to trial thermal technology in the eradication of wild fallow deer within the WoJNP and reduce numbers of wild fallow deer within the CPCA to alleviate migration pressures into the WoJNP.

The project is running over three years with all preparation and planning completed in April 2023. Operational deployments occurred in May 2023 and are scheduled for May 2024. May has been selected as the best month for undertaking the operation due to the following factors:

- May is the end of the rut with deer still in groups and/or trying to fatten prior to winter;
- the recreational fishing season closes on April 30 (most waters);
- recreational use is reduced after Easter;
- autumn weather is generally more stable for aerial operations;
- the weather is cool particularly at altitude which assists in thermal detection of deer;
- there is a need to undertake the deployment prior to the onset of wetter winter weather; and
- the Wedgetail Eagle breeding starts in June.

THERMAL ASSISTED AERIAL CULLING

The project is predominantly an aerial shooting program from a helicopter using thermal technology. This method is currently being used in a number of mainland jurisdictions with great success. Thermal Assisted Aerial Culling (TAAC) differs from conventional aerial shooting methods in that operations are guided by a high-quality thermal imager and a manual operator. Shooting only occurs in times of low solar warming (such as first light / last light), usually 3 to 4 hours per day although it can operate all day on heavily clouded days. The benefits of TAAC are:

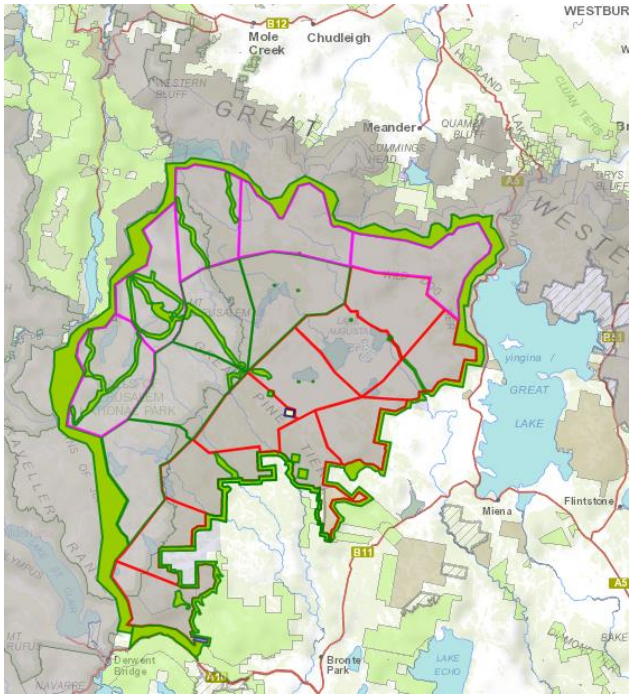
- animals are identified and targeted more easily including from a distance;
- animals can be tracked through cover;
- scattered herds can easily be reacquired;
- non target species can easily be identified; and
- all relevant data is captured allowing for review of animal welfare outcomes.

Deer Thermal Visibility

Project Area

The project area has been divided into daily task units to ensure that the entire project area is thoroughly and systematically examined for deer. The helicopter flies each unit in a search grid pattern scanning for deer. The grid transects can be moved closer together or further apart depending on the thoroughness required and purpose of the days objectives. Each daily task unit is a discreet area that considers reserve and private boundaries, infrastructure, buffer zones, special features and no shoot areas. No shooting zones were established 1000 metres from shack communities, 500 metres from agricultural and forestry boundaries and 250 metres from reserve huts, shacks, roads, tracks and other infrastructure within park boundaries. Live mapping in the

aircraft ensures that any buffers and no shoot zones are visible at all times and adhered to.



Shooting area and no shooting zones (green areas)

Personnel and Aircraft

Nine NRE Tas officers with considerable shooting experience were selected from a pool of approximately eighty NRE Tas authorised firearm officers to participate in the aerial shooting training. Seven NRE Tas officers successfully completed their training as aerial marksmen. All seven officers were rostered over the deployment period to ensure a shared workload in a challenging operating environment.

Operations were conducted out of a Eurocopter AS350 B3 helicopter

Project aircraft

Shooting was limited to short periods after first light and before last light and on days with heavy cloud cover. Shooters and the thermal camera operator sat on the edge of the aircraft in temperatures as low as minus six scanning below for signs of deer body heat as they scanned the project area.

Animal Welfare

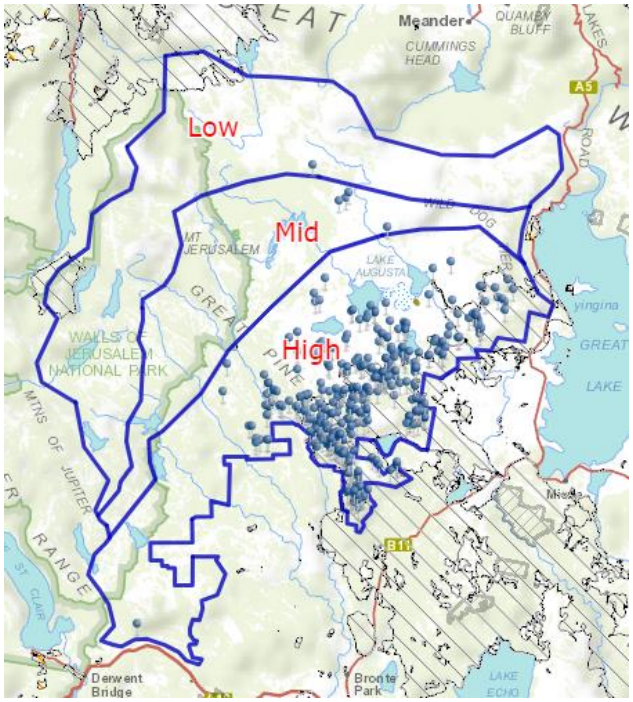
A primary objective is to uphold the highest of animal welfare standards when undertaking any culling operations. NRE Tas Deer Culling Operational Procedures have been designed to ensure all culling activities are consistent with National Guidelines and place animal welfare as the highest priority. During the operational phase of the aerial shooting, the project was overseen by an independent veterinarian and a veterinary officer was present for every day of shooting to ensure there was appropriate oversight.

The independent veterinarian in charge of animal welfare oversight said:

"I am satisfied that every effort was made to ensure the best animal welfare outcomes possible during this operation. The methodology used ensured that the time elapsed from engagement with a particular animal to insensibility was minimised and that no injured deer escaped. In my opinion high standards of animal welfare were upheld throughout the operation."

2023 Operational Deployment Facts

- From the period May 3 to May 23, 711 deer were humanely destroyed within the project area.
- The 711 deer consisted of 244 stags, 417 antlerless deer and 50 immature deer.
- A total of 39 flights were conducted.
- The aircraft operated for 72.4 hours.
- The aircraft traversed 113,000 hectares in a search grid pattern travelling 4,369 kilometres.
- Only two days were not suitable due to bad weather.
- No time was lost to equipment malfunction or breakages.
- A total of 4,588 rounds were fired during the operational phase.
- Each deer was compulsorily shot at least 3 times in rapid succession as required by standard operating procedures.
- There were zero wounded animal escapes.
- The entire project period was monitored to assess animal welfare outcomes by both independent contracted and Government veterinary officers.
- Veterinary officers were satisfied that all animal welfare outcomes were achieved.
- Most of the deer shot were located within the high density zone of the CPCA, thus reducing migration pressures in the WoJNP.
- Pre aerial cull monitoring was completed in April 2023 and post cull monitoring is due in July 2023.
- A small number of deer that were shot close to Lake Augusta Rd were relocated to an area away from the public infrastructure.



Deer carcass locations

The Project – Where to from here

Post cull monitoring, camera retrieval and surveys will occur in July 2023 which will assist in determining how successful the first part of the cull has been. It will also help in determining the movement of deer in the control area. This monitoring will be repeated before and after next year's cull as well.

PWS will trial lead free ammunition prior to next year's cull. If the ammunition is determined to be sufficiently accurate and can continue to have the appropriate animal welfare outcomes it will be used in 2024.

This year's cull focused on population reduction in what is known as the high-density area to reduce migration pressures on the WoJNP. Next year's cull will be more focussed on the WoJNP itself with closer transects and increased thermal imaging capability in the aircraft. This will ensure that the priority for next year will be on ensuring wild fallow deer are fully eradicated from the WoJNP. Once PWS is satisfied that the WoJNP is free of deer, the cull will continue into the mid and high zones to further reduce migration pressures.

Next year's cull program is currently due to commence on April 28, 2024 and conclude by 2 June 2024.

PWS would like to thank the community for adhering to the closures of the WoJNP and CPCA during May 2023.

For further information on the TWWHA Deer Control project please go to TWWHA - Deer Control Project 2023-2024 | Parks & Wildlife Service Tasmania or contact the TWWHA Deer Control project officer, Mr Robert Buck via email at Deer.Project@parks.tas.gov.au.