Cairngorms National Park Authority

Red Deer Management and Venison Subsidy Scheme

Grant Moir, Chief Executive, 14 October 2026

Subsidy Scheme Established Within Terms of Subsidy Control Act 2022

This document sets out the terms of the Cairngorms National Park Authority's (the "**Park Authority**") Red Deer Management and Venison Subsidy Scheme ("the Scheme")

The Park Authority, having considered the subsidy control principles set out in the Subsidy Control Act 2022 ("**SCA**") and being of the view that subsidy given under the Scheme will be consistent with those principles, implements the Scheme under its powers in section 9 of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 in accordance with section 10(1) of the SCA.

The Scheme as established relates to the management of red deer only. Any reference to "deer" is deemed within this Scheme to refer to red deer only.

Date of Subsidy Scheme Established Under the SCA

The Deer Management and Venison Subsidy Scheme is made on 14 October 2026, takes effect from 21st October 2026, and will end on 31 March 2027.

The Park Authority may at any time extend the duration of the Scheme by amending the end date provided that the Park Authority is satisfied that the Scheme remains relevant and compliant with al legislative requirements.

Purpose of Subsidy Scheme and Public Policy Objectives Delivered By Subsidy

The Park Authority has a statutory responsibility under the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 to ensure that the aims of the Cairngorms National Park are collectively achieved in a coordinated way. The Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan (CNPPP) is the key strategic planning tool delivering this statutory responsibility. The CNPPP approved by the Park Authority board is agreed by Scottish Ministers. The current CNPPP is in place for the period April 2022 to March 2027. Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan 2022-27 - Cairngorms National Park Authority

The CNPPP Objective A4 focuses on the agreed priority objectives for addressing deer and herbivore impacts on the other National Park priority objectives. Deer are important species in the National Park, providing income, employment and enjoyment. However, there is a need to reduce the impacts of deer and other herbivores in key areas of the National Park to enable peatland and

woodland work to proceed at the scale necessary to meet the Park Authority's climate and nature commitments. In particular, there is a need to reduce deer numbers where they are having a significant impact on existing habitats or preventing beneficial habitat change.

There are currently public policy concerns that in certain places there are too many wild deer that will negatively affect work to tackle the nature and climate crisis. Therefore, making sure deer are at sustainable levels is important in the battle to fight climate change. Deer management is integral to delivering the public interest priorities set out in the Park Authority's CNPPP. These include priorities for woodland expansion (both productive and montane woodland), peatland restoration and designated sites, as well as employment. Because deer have no natural predators in the UK, culling is the only means of effective deer management and control of deer numbers.

Research indicates that reducing red deer numbers and moving towards a more balanced stag to hind ratio can result in a sporting resource of better-quality stags with greater carcass weights and better antlers, as well as improved fecundity in hinds and reduced winter mortality. Access to improved grazing and woodland shelter can also improve the carcass weight and welfare of red deer. The Park Authority has established that reducing the density of deer has resulted in significant woodland regeneration and habitat restoration. Very low densities are required to enable tree seedlings to establish but, in time, with increased food availability and shelter, the habitat can again support more deer. There are therefore welfare advantages as well as habitat advantages to moving in this direction.

Existing public policy provisions supporting management of deer and deer numbers have not been sufficient to control deer populations to required deer density in specific geographic areas within the Cairngorms National Park. This has been evidenced by repeated monitoring of deer densities over various deer management groups within the Cairngorms.

This subsidy is established to incentivise an increase in the number of hinds and calves culled on land in and bordering the Cairngorms National Park to reduce deer density and impacts in the Cairngorms.

The Park Authority's assessment is that this subsidy is a necessary additional public policy intervention to complement existing measures already implemented in order to promote and secure required levels of action on deer management that are sufficient to achieve the agreed public policy objectives established for the Cairngorms National Park through the CNPPP. If subsidy is not provided, there is a significant risk that the number of deer culled will not increase toward target levels. This is highly likely to have a detrimental effect on the natural environment. This will result in failure to achieve both the target for deer density and also wider targets on net zero, woodland expansion, peatland restoration and moorland management.

As such, the Park Authority has determined that a subsidy to seek to encourage more proactive deer management through culling is an essential tool to implement as a trial to support delivery of policy objectives around achieving reduced deer densities in the Cairngorms National Park. This is expected to have wider positive impacts in supporting delivery of other agreed CNPPP public policy objectives.

The subsidy is consistent with the Energy and Environment Principles established in the SCA. The subsidy scheme's policy objectives seek to support the natural environment, and support action on the climate and nature emergency. Receipt of the subsidy does not relieve the recipient from any liabilities arising from its responsibilities as a polluter under the relevant law of Scotland.

The subsidy is assessed to have minimal impacts on competition and distortion of the economy, as covered in the section on Scheme design below.

The Park Authority recognises the potential for the subsidy to result in an over-supply of carcasses for the wild venison industry although the risk is deemed low given that bigger culls have been taken in these DMGs before. The Park Authority is leading on associated project work to develop enhanced processing capacity to help ensure that the deer carcasses resulting from increased cull levels which this subsidy targets may be brought effectively and economically into the food supply chain.

Anticipated Subsidy Scheme Budget

The Scheme has an anticipated budget of £40,000 to £60,000 in the 2026/27 financial year, ending 31 March 2027.

Conditions, Form and Calculation of Subsidy Scheme

There is no automatic entitlement to subsidy under the Scheme and any funding is provided at the discretion of the Park Authority. Any award is subject to the Park Authority's assessment against the Scheme conditions, Park Authority approval and acceptance of standard terms and conditions of grant. The conditions, form and calculation of the deer management are:

1. The Scheme is open to all owners or occupiers who are obliged in terms of the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996 (the "**1996 Act**") to submit deer cull data to NatureScot where those owners or occupiers own or occupy land within at least part of the designated area of the Cairngorms National Park: areas covered by the South Grampian Deer Management Group or West Grampians Deer Management Group ("**eligible applicants**").

2. The CNPPP targets average open range red deer densities in each deer management group of a maximum of five to eight per km^2. The movement of deer across land management boundaries justifies the Scheme being open to all eligible applicants to assist in managing total deer density within the Cairngorms National Park toward this policy objective.

3. The Park Authority will invite interest from eligible applicants to participate in the Scheme. The Park Authority will also advertise the Scheme on its website to allow applications to come from any other body. The Park Authority will assess all applications for eligibility.

4. The Park Authority will agree a deer cull target for 2026/27 with each eligible applicant.

5. An eligible applicant must achieve a red deer hind cull of at least 85% of their agreed 2026/27 target, as established under point 4, in order to be entitled to the subsidy. Subsidy calculations will include figures of calves culled with hinds as eligible for subsidy rates, and will be evidenced by eligible applicants' statutory deer cull data submissions to NatureScot in terms of the 1996 Act or other agreed forms of evidence as agreed in writing in advance with the Park Authority. Eligible applicants must also provide proof of cull by supplying game dealer uplift receipts or another acceptable documented proof of cull, e.g. receipts of purchase from a butchery business.

6. Subsidy will be provided as a grant calculated at £100 per carcass, paid for each carcass in excess of 85% of the agreed 2026/27 target cull level for that eligible applicant. Therefore, as an illustration, where the agreed 2026/27 target for an eligible applicant is 100 hinds they must achieve a cull of at least 85 deer to be eligible for subsidy. Where the target is met in full with evidence of 100 carcasses, payment will be £100 for each of 15 (100-85) hind carcasses + associated calves= £1,500 plus £100 per associated calf. Should an applicant achieve a cull of 95 with appropriate evidence, payment would be £1,000 plus £100 for each associated calf.

7. Subsidy will not be capped.

8. The period for culling activity eligible for subsidy is from 21st October 2026 to 31st March 2026. Eligible applicants must secure any appropriate permissions to cull deer required to support their operations over this period – approval for subsidy by the Park Authority shall not be deemed to confer approval to undertake deer culls. The operation of this subsidy will be reviewed following 31 March 2026.

9. Terms of subsidy offered to eligible applicants will require that an acceptance of an offer and payment of subsidy will include a declaration that the recipient has not received other public subsidy to support the activities covered by this Scheme. Where public funds have been provided to support activities linked to the operation of the Scheme, such funds must be disclosed to and assessed by the Park Authority.

10. Data for the cull levels and targets, and also for the cull levels to be assessed as qualifying for subsidy rates within the Scheme, will be gathered from the NatureScot 2026 deer count.

The subsidy is therefore designed to incentivise an increase in deer cull levels in the eligible areas, mitigating against environmental damage which could arise from any reduction in historic cull levels and supporting movement to more sustainable future deer density.

The subsidy is paid in respect of the specific measured level of deer culls compared with target, as a sum per carcass, therefore paying subsidy based on the specific output targeted rather than supporting investment in any infrastructure or adaptation required to support an increase in culling activity. As such the subsidy is directly targeting the output sought of increased cull numbers.

The distortive impacts of the subsidy are considered to be minimal, given the relatively small amounts likely to be paid to each individual recipient and in consideration of the costs to the eligible applicants incurred in achieving the increased deer cull targeted by the subsidy.

Actual levels of subsidy paid to each recipient will be monitored and reported to the Park Authority's board or an appropriate committee, and Scottish Government at the end of each year in which the subsidy operates in order to be transparent on Scheme impacts and to review potential levels of distortion created by the Scheme.