

Feral Wild Boar

Management Plan

Forest of Dean

Period: 2011 to 2016

Executive Summary

This management plan sets out the range of issues pertaining to feral wild boar on the public forest estate in the Dean Forest District. The objective of managing feral wild boar is to exercise a level of population control so as to reduce the risk of adverse contact with the general public living in or visiting the Forest of Dean.

An acceptable population level of less than 90 animals in the Forest of Dean has been previously set, however the population is known to be significantly above that at the present time.

The only approved method of population control on the public forest estate will be through shooting – which will include trapping and shooting – by duly authorised Forestry Commission staff.

This management plan sets out the need to maintain high levels of awareness of the presence of wild boar in the forest, and the key messages to be imparted to the community – both resident and visiting.

This management plan also sets out the research needs for managing the boar population, the priority for which is deriving a simple, reliable method of estimating the population size so that we can model the population dynamic and accordingly set accurate and defensible cull levels.

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1.0 Overview & Scope

- 1.1 This management plan sets out the range of issues pertaining to feral wild boar on the public forest estate in the Dean Forest District. For the avoidance of doubt, the public forest estate includes the land owned or otherwise legally managed by the Forestry Commission in the Statutory Forest, as well as the wider Forest of Dean District Council area, and the Herefordshire outliers of Penyard and Chase Woods, Haugh Woods and Dymock Woods. These woods are shown in Appendix One.
- 1.2 This management plan does not cover privately owned land adjacent to the public forest estate whether inside the Statutory Forest of the Forest of Dean or not.
- 1.3 This management plan updates the document 'Forest of Dean Feral Wild Boar Management Strategy 2009 – 2014'. This plan should be seen as a local strategy, complementing the national Forestry Commission document 'Operations Instruction No 24 – Management of Feral Wild Boar on the Public Forest Estate (May 2008)' this is reproduced in Appendix Two. The Forestry Commission strategy reflects the over-arching DEFRA document 'Feral Wild Boar in England: An Action Plan' (DEFRA 2008).

2.0 Origins of the Forest of Dean population.

- 2.1 The feral wild boar population in the Forest of Dean is believed to have originated from two primary sources. In the 1990's a large number of farmed boar are understood to have escaped from a farm near Ross on Wye into the public forest estate woods of Penyard and Chase. These animals established a breeding population that was largely controlled by shooting on farmland adjoining the woods. In 2004 a group of around 60 farm-raised boar were dumped near Staunton. These animals moved into Highmeadow Woods. That population rapidly became established in the ideal territory presented by the Forest of Dean. Animals from the Staunton release are known to have moved in to the core woodland of the Forest of Dean during 2006. There is now a general consensus that animals from both the Ross group and Staunton groups have merged and spread across the whole of the statutory Forest of Dean, and out into the Wye Valley. There is some evidence that animals have moved into parts of Monmouthshire and further north in Herefordshire. It is not clear whether sightings further afield are as a result of the gradual movement outwards of the Dean population or as a result of additional releases or escapes from captivity.

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- 2.2 The keeping of wild boar is covered by the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 which contains provision for Local Authorities (District Councils/ Unitary Authorities) to licence their keeping and specify conditions in the licence such as minimum fencing requirements. The Act requires that the conditions of a licence are written in such a way as to ensure that the animal is held in secure accommodation from which it will not escape. Failure to meet the licence conditions is an offence under the Act.

3.0 Evolution of the Management Strategies for Feral Wild Boar.

- 3.1 The overarching national management strategy 'Feral Wild Boar in England: An Action Plan' (DEFRA 2008) drew upon public consultation work in 2005 and 2006. The Action Plan states that '**DEFRA Policy is that primary responsibility for feral wild boar lies with local communities and individual landowners.**' The Action Plan goes on to state that the Government will facilitate this regional management through the provision of advice and guidance. In providing that advice and guidance the role of the **Deer Initiative** is acknowledged as a key partner.
- 3.2 Following the publication of the DEFRA Action Plan the Forest of Dean District Council set up a task group to investigate the issue. That investigation included a period of public consultation, and the task group reported to the Forest of Dean District Council's Scrutiny and Review Committee in June 2009. The Committee recommended to the Forest of Dean Verderers that the Forestry Commission should manage feral wild boar on the public forest estate and that the number should be controlled at a level less than at that time and that boar should be encouraged to remain in the wooded areas of the forest.
- 3.3 The Verderers of the Forest of Dean endorsed that strategy, and required the number of boar on the public forest estate in the Forest of Dean to be maintained below 90 animals (that being the number estimated to be present at that time).
- 3.4 The original Forestry Commission strategy for the Forest of Dean was produced in 2009. This plan (produced in winter 2010/11) is an update to the original strategy as experience and knowledge of the subject has advanced rapidly.
- 3.5 The Forestry Commission Operations Instruction No 24 'Management of Feral Wild Boar on the Public Forest Estate' was produced in 2008 in recognition of the need to provide clear internal guidance for the control of boar by Forestry Commission staff.

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3.6 The 'Classical Swine Fever (CSF) Disease Control Strategy' (DEFRA 2010) refers to feral wild boar. The strategy requires any unusual mortality or disease observed in feral pigs to be investigated in consultation with the relevant administration within GB. Also the Meat Hygiene Service inspects carcasses of shot feral pigs presented at game handling establishments and any suspect cases would be followed up through the normal "report cases" system. No further disease surveillance in feral pigs populations is intended when CSF is absent from the UK. Should CSF become established in farmed populations (or indeed the feral population) then the CSF strategy for movement restrictions will kick in and take precedence over local management scenarios.

4.0 The role of the Verderers in the Forest of Dean

4.1 The Verderers have been an important part of the administration of the Forest of Dean for nearly a millennium and they continue to be charged with overseeing the welfare of the "vert and venison" in the Forest. Historically the term "venison" has included boar as well as deer. Boar management issues will be discussed with the Verderers at the Court (held quarterly) and management documents (such as this management plan) will be discussed with the Verderers for their endorsement.

5.0 Current Impacts of Feral Wild Boar on the Communities of the Forest of Dean.

5.1 The true impact of feral wild boar on the community of the Forest of Dean is difficult to gauge as perceptions of the boar differ so widely between individuals (see section on public perceptions). The impacts can be summarised as follows:

- **Damage to amenity grasslands, roadside verges, playing fields and gardens.** Feral wild boar have particularly powerful snouts which they use to grub around in the top soil, and by doing so the animals can turn over large areas of grass in relatively short periods. The purpose of this is believed to be to root out tubers, corms and other bulbs, as well as earthworms and beetles to supplement their diet. The impact on people depends entirely on how close the damage is to their lives – turning over of roadside verges in the heart of the forest has only a limited impact, whilst turning over large areas of amenity grassland outside people's homes has a much more immediate and deep impact upon the householders concerned.
- **Damage to garden fences, over turning bins and breaking into garden sheds.** Feral wild boar are now getting into private gardens in many of the

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villages that lie alongside the core forest areas. Again the impact on individuals is highly variable according to the severity of the damage, and regularity of the unwanted visits; and on the underlying perceptions of the individual to wild animals and being able to see wild animals close up. Some people react with fear and anger, otherwise with pleasure at being able to view the animals up close.

- **Threat of direct injury to people and dogs.** Feral wild boar are potentially dangerous animals and locally have been subject to high profile media stories related to attacks on dogs. There is no doubt that a number of dogs have died as a direct result of being attacked by boar – direct reports to the Forestry Commission suggest the number is around 5 or 6 – but that is likely to be under-reported. There are many stories of individuals being attacked by boar in the area, but as yet only one incident of injury to a human has been reported to the Forestry Commission in the Dean. That injury was to an individual who was feeding an adult boar whilst a child was also teasing the animal with a stick. Public perceptions of the threat posed by boar are again highly variable. Views range from those who report that they no longer walk / ride in the forest due to risk of coming across the animals, to those who happily walk in the woods every day and say they have either never seen a boar, or only ever had positive encounters with them.
- **Threat to horse riders.** Horses often react unpredictably when they come across wild boar. There are stories that have come to Forestry Commission staff of horse riders being thrown from their horse when boar have been close by, or even charged their horse. However, no reports have yet been received directly, so it is very difficult to gauge the true number of such incidents and thus the true threat level.
- **Threat through Road Traffic Accidents.** 22 boar were recorded as being killed in road traffic accidents in the Forest of Dean last year (1st April 2010 to 31st March 2011). During the same period around 50 deer were also killed on the forest's roads. Deer are present in much higher numbers than the feral wild boar, but their nocturnal activity on roadside verges seems to be contributing to a proportionally higher risk of boar being involved in collisions with vehicles. Every road traffic accident has the potential to cause injury to the driver or other occupants of the vehicles concerned, and thus collisions with boar are another potential threat to road users in the forest.

5.2 The true extent of the impacts of wild boar on the communities of the Forest of Dean is thus virtually impossible to measure. It seems to be true that the majority of the community view the boar as a benign part of the forest; but that

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view rapidly changes to one of 'unwanted pest' when the boar come into contact with a specific community, especially over protracted periods. It must also be acknowledged that some of those who have had unpleasant / scary encounters with the boar still believe the boar have a right to be in the forest, and indeed the forest is a better place for their presence. As the number of boar grow, the likelihood is that the proportion of the community calling for the boar to be culled will increase.

6.0 Current Impacts of Feral Wild Boar on the Ecology and Silviculture of the Forest of Dean.

- 6.1 Work to study the ecological impacts of feral wild boar in the Forest of Dean has hardly begun. There does seem to be a consensus amongst researchers that ecologically, feral wild boar are unlikely to have a negative impact upon the forest. Indeed because of the manner in which the boar disturb the soil in rooting for grubs and tubers there is likely to be a locally positive impact on the woodland ecosystem. As the grass and herb layers of the forest floor, forest waste and other verges are broken up by the boar, the disturbance introduces conditions for improved floristic diversity in what can be quite stable habitats. Although considerably more long-term research is required, at current density levels it seems fair to conclude the boar are having no detrimental impact upon woodland ecology, and may even be a positive influence.
- 6.2 During the autumn and winter of 2010/11 the amount of damage to amenity grassland and road and track verges was the worst seen, with some verges being turned over repeatedly during the winter. The reasons for this are not clear and may be linked to the excellent mast year (plentiful production of acorns by the forest's oaks). Acorns are clearly a preferred food source for the feral wild boar and it is thought that they need grubs and salts from the roadside verges to supplement or help digest the acorns. Regardless of the reasons for this behaviour – the degree of verge damage, particularly within the woodland blocks lead to a number of ride verges being turned over that were of particular importance to locally and nationally rare butterfly species that over winter as pupae in the grass herbage. Local butterfly conservation groups and individuals are particularly concerned that this activity may have had an extremely detrimental impact on those particular butterfly colonies. This requires further research and investigation.
- 6.2 The feral wild boar are not having a significant impact upon the silviculture of the forest (the growing of the timber trees). There has been damage to fences erected to protect young trees from grazing by sheep and deer, but this is not

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significantly different to damage by other animals such as badgers. The boar do not graze on the trees as deer do, and again unlike deer and squirrels the boar are not known to damage the trees bark. The biggest impact may be the boar's consumption of acorns, which may well reduce the capacity of the forest's oak to regenerate naturally over the long-term.

7.0 Rationale for Managing the Feral Wild Boar Population at the Present Time

7.1 The rationale for managing the feral wild boar on the public forest estate in the Forest of Dean at the present time is thus to:

- Minimise the risk of adverse interaction between people, dogs, horses and the boar by keeping population densities low;
- Minimise the visual and physical damage to amenity grasslands by keeping population levels down and as far as possible confined to the core forest areas;
- Maintain the population at a manageable size on the public forest estate so numbers can continue to be controlled in the future.

7.2 It is also worth noting that the management of the feral wild boar population is not intended nor expected to prevent the natural spread of the boar into neighbouring areas of countryside. Whilst the pressure on neighbouring areas could be expected to grow if the population in the Dean was not controlled – it is not true to say that controlling the numbers in the forest will prevent the boar as individuals or family groups wandering into new territories away from the forest.

8.0 Public Perceptions of Feral Wild Boar in the Forest of Dean

8.1 Independent research into the public perceptions of boar by Dr John Dutton & Hayley Clayton from the University of Worcester was carried out in 2009/10. The research, based on 950 surveys, has provided a statistically valid snap-shot of the views of people living in, and visiting the Forest of Dean. The results from that research will be published at a later date by the University, however interim results are discussed below:

8.2 99.8% of local people who completed a questionnaire confirmed that they were aware that wild boar were present in the forest. Whilst all self-completion questionnaires can be argued to have a degree of bias attracting more responses from those with an interest in the subject, this result strongly indicates that the forest community is very well aware of the boar.

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- 8.3 85.4% of visitors to the forest who completed a questionnaire confirmed that they were aware that wild boar were present in the forest. Although this result indicates a lower level of awareness than the resident community, the figure is surprisingly high and further analysis may be beneficial to understand what the figure is saying about forest visitors and existing signs and information provision.
- 8.4 72.9% of the resident community who completed questionnaires stated that they had seen wild boar. This is again a surprisingly high figure as numbers of boar are relatively low (compared to the estimated carrying capacity of the forest). This figure may be reflecting the bias of self-completion questionnaires, or it may be reflecting that actually around three-quarters of the community have seen the boar in the last 2 or 3 years. The figure for visitors was significantly lower, with only a fifth of visitors saying they had seen the boar – although again this is higher than we would have expected.
- 8.5 Of those who reported seeing the boar, around half indicated they had sighted boar on between 2 and 5 occasions. Around a third had only seen the boar once, and the balance, less than a fifth of those questioned had seen them more than 6 times.
- 8.6 Around a third of sightings were of single boar, and two-thirds sightings were of groups. This is to be expected as the boar are most frequently encountered as family groups with lone males foraging / roaming further afield.
- 8.7 A further question was asked to ascertain the most frequent time of day boar were seen. The results indicated that dawn was the least likely time for boar to be seen by the public, but otherwise there was no clear difference between, mornings, afternoons or dusk. The low result for dawn may just be indicative of fewer people moving around the forest early in the morning.
- 8.8 For those respondents who indicated that they had seen the boar, a further question was asked to ascertain whether people felt excited, scared, threatened, interested or concerned at seeing the animals. Interestingly there was no apparent difference between responses for the local community or visitors to this question with: 35.7% being excited and 40.5% being interested; 11.7% being concerned, 7.6% being scared and 4.2% feeling threatened by the encounter.
- 8.9 All respondents were then asked whether they were concerned by the presence of free living wild boar in the Forest of Dean. Of the resident community 29.2% indicated that to be the case, with 67% stating that they were not concerned. Visitors to the forest responded differently with just 12% indicating concern and over 80% indicating that they were unconcerned.

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- 8.10 The questionnaire also looked at property damage and recorded that 4.7% of respondents had suffered damage to their property as a result of the boar being in the area. Even fewer, 1.1% of residents claimed to have had livestock stray as a result of boar damaging fences or hedges.
- 8.11 Respondents were asked whether they supported total eradication of the boar from the forest – 80% of the resident community said no (91.3% of visitors); and 13.1% of local residents said yes to total eradication.
- 8.12 A series of questions were then asked to ascertain views on managing the numbers of wild boar in the forest. Overall 60% agreed or strongly agreed to manage the population in light of public safety concerns, with 17.2% disagreeing. There was considerably less support to managing the population to reduce property damage or address straying livestock concerns with 28% and 26% of respondents overall disagreeing. There was more support for managing the population to control the spread of disease, with 62% agreeing and only 13.2% disagreeing with this [currently there is no specific issue with disease in the wild population].
- 8.13 Further analysis by the researchers should enable a more complete breakdown against gender, and home locations.
- 8.14 This work provides an extremely useful snapshot of the public perception towards boar at a relatively early stage of the boar's reappearance in the forest. The views captured show a close correlation with the consultation feedback received by the task group set up by the Forest of Dean District Council..

9.0 Current Population Estimates and Culling Targets

- 9.1 There are no realistic / reliable means for establishing precisely the size of the feral wild boar population in the Forest of Dean. Census methods used for assessing the size of the wild deer population in the forest are not transferable to boar for a number of reasons, including significantly smaller population densities and considerably higher reproductive rates.
- 9.2 In early summer 2009 the population of feral wild boar in the Forest of Dean (the statutory forest plus Highmeadow Woods) was estimated at 90 animals. During the period 1st April 2008 to 31st March 2009 the Forestry Commission achieved a cull of 38 boar from the same area; and in the period 1st April 2009 to 31st March 2010 a cull of 62 animals was achieved.

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- 9.3 In late spring 2010 the population (including young) was estimated at between 200 and 250 animals. A cull target of 150 animals was set (to bring that population back to below 90 animals). Between 1st April 2010 and 31st March 2011, 122 animals were culled (including road traffic accident casualties).
- 9.4 In March 2011 the population was estimated to have grown to between 300 and 350 animals. The cull target has been left at 150 animals, although logic dictates that to bring that population back to 90 animals a target of 200 to 250 animals should have been set.
- 9.5 Future culling targets need to be linked to estimated population size at the start of each year – and to reproductive rates. Research reports from other areas where boar are naturalised in the environment suggest that the population has the ability to treble every 12-months. Therefore to maintain the population at a steady level the numbers culled must be in excess of the known population size – arguably twice the known population size. In determining this we are seriously hampered by the lack of a reliable census method. The estimate used to determine population size in 2010 was simply the estimates of Forestry Commission wildlife staff working within the forest. However, if 90 animals is taken to be accurate in spring 2009, then the population could have been expected to treble to 270 animals in the following 12-months to spring 2010. During that same period 62 animals were culled – bringing the theoretical number back to 208. In the spring 2010 the population was estimated at between 200 and 250 animals – which is consistent with the 208 theoretical number. The cull for 1st April 2010 to 31st March 2011 was set at 150 animals in order to bring the population back to below 90 animals as per the strategy. By mid of September 2010 a cull of 60 animals had been taken against a backdrop of significant and widespread damage to the forest's amenity grasslands in the same month. Most people concerned with this issue agree that this is the worst autumn for damage yet seen. This only suggests that the boar numbers are at their highest levels yet, and thus the view that very high cull levels are required to maintain the population at a steady level would seem to be correct.
- 9.6 Reports from the community indicate that large family groups of up to 40 boar could be seen regularly in the late evenings and night in communities around Ruardean and Ruardean Hill in the autumn of 2010. This suggests that the highest population densities at that time were in the forest edge communities alongside open farmland. Photographic evidence of groups of up to 15 boar has also been captured in the urban fringes of Cinderford and Steam Mills showing the boar are happy to push out into industrial and housing areas.

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- 9.7 No significant culling has taken place inside Penyard and Chase Woods near Ross-on-Wye as this site has been the focus of Research work into the feral wild boar population and associated methods of delivering contraceptives as a non-lethal means of population control. That work came to a close in March 2011, and culling will be re-started in these woods in from April 2011.
- 9.8 To assist in developing a census methodology – from September 2011 monitoring using night vision technology will be undertaken to record boar (and deer) numbers along fixed transects through the forest. This will be repeated at 6-monthly intervals. This will not give a population estimate per se, but will set a minimum possible population and be a tool to estimate population trends. The transects will be mapped and used at each survey.

10.0 Culling Methods on the Public Forest Estate

- 10.1 The sensitivity of the issue of culling wild animals on public land is recognised, as are the animal welfare issues and public safety issues. The public perception research discussed previously clearly shows that around a third of the community do not support the culling of the wild boar. However, that same work does endorse the Commission's mandate to control the population on public safety grounds with a slim, 59%, majority in favour of culling for this reason. This fits with the locally agreed strategy as discussed at the outset of this management plan.
- 10.2 The only legal method to control wild boar is by shooting. The use of poison is illegal. Shooting on the public forest estate in the Forest of Dean will **ONLY** be carried out by Forestry Commission staff duly trained and authorised to do so. Approved tactics currently include – stalking on foot, shooting from high seats, shooting over bait and shooting in cage traps. The only method that we will not employ at present is night shooting, which whilst legal for wild boar, introduces additional health and safety risks. Night shooting remains an option that can be considered in the future. Technical details of the use of firearms are covered by Forestry Commission Operations Instructions and separate risk assessments.
- 10.3 The level of staff resource available within the Forestry Commission to undertake the cull is both small and static and in the current financial climate is unlikely to increase in the foreseeable future. Therefore the deer and boar culls need to be completed by the same pool of staff in the same time limits. Whilst our knowledge of the habits and movements of feral wild boar are improving, the efficiency of the activity remains low (ie. number of hours to cull 1 boar is roughly 4 times more than for 1 deer). To achieve the high cull levels we need to increase

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the efficiency and effectiveness of the cull process. This is most likely to be brought about by improving the effectiveness of trapping, and accordingly in the summer of 2010 the Forestry Commission's Forest Research Technical Development Branch was asked to review the whole process of boar trapping to provide advice on best practice from around the world.

- 10.4 The traps currently used in the Forest of Dean are heavy steel fabricated single animal cage traps. These are both heavy and awkward to deploy requiring a large pick-up truck and 4 men. Any new design of trap should be looking towards lighter weight materials (whilst maintaining strength) and towards multi-capture or corral traps so that more than 1 animal can be caught at once. Sectional designs are likely to come to the fore to enable easier, more efficient deployment by 2-man teams.
- 10.5 Deployment of multi-capture or corral traps in specific locations within or immediately adjacent to communities / settlements where the community has complained about repeated incursions by large numbers of animals. If successful, the corral traps would provide an opportunity to catch and remove a whole 'problem' sounder group over a short time period. The community may also be prepared to support the trapping work through baiting and reporting back when traps are triggered. However, the sensitivities regarding this activity is such that it may be difficult to achieve a consensus amongst a specific community for this action and as such this needs to be carefully and sensitively trialed.
- 10.6 The removal of animals from a corral trap has been discussed and considered. The herding of captured animals onto a livestock trailer is likely to cause unacceptable stress to what are free-living wild animals. So whilst the notion of taking captured animals for humane dispatch at a licensed abattoir sounds more humane than shooting within the trap in the forest – the reality is the opposite would be true. In practice the health and safety implications for the persons involved in such an operation would be considerable – both in the forest and at the abattoir.
- 10.7 The carcasses of all wild boar culled will be handled as for deer, in general accordance with the Forestry Commission Wild Venison Standard, with appropriate additional monitoring for disease as per Ops Instruction No 24. We will seek to have boar venison included within the FSC certification scheme as sustainably managed wild venison in the same way as deer as the purpose is to manage the population sustainably and not to eradicate.
- 10.8 The use of contraceptives to control wild populations of animals is subject of past and on-going research. There is no legally approved contraceptive drug that can

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be used on feral wild boar at this time. Whilst research in this field is continuing – it is extremely unlikely that this option will become available to the Forestry Commission during the life of this plan (ie. The period 2011 to 2016).

10.9 Feral Wild Boar do not enjoy the protection of a closed season (ie. a period where it is not normally permissible to cull the animal). Boar have the capability of breeding all year round, although it is fair to say that the majority of hoglets are born in the early spring with a peak in March / April and May. To address this the Forestry Commission have what can be termed a voluntary and fluid closed season embedded in existing practice. This is the clear policy position that Forestry Commission staff will not shoot lactating sows with dependent young at hoof – unless there are other animal welfare issues in play – for example if the sow has been injured in a road traffic accident or is otherwise obviously in distress. In which case every attempt will be made to take out the dependent young first.

11.0 Control on Private Land:

11.1 As with deer, the Forestry Commission has no duty to control feral wild boar on private land. As with deer, rabbits and other pest species there are a number of competent persons who can provide a professional service to support private land-owners in culling the boar on their land. The Deer Initiative agreed in January 2011 to seek funding to establish a Boar Management Group in the Forest of Dean to co-ordinate the culling of feral wild boar on private land, and provide support to affected communities in partnership with the Forestry Commission. Such a Boar Management Group is envisaged to be established on the same lines as the existing national network of local Deer Management Groups which are facilitated by the Deer Initiative. The timescales for consulting on and establishing a Boar Management Group will be entirely dependent on identification of funding and resources.

11.2 The boundary of the public forest estate in the Forest of Dean is complex with fingers of forest waste extending into many villages. The wildlife staff undertaking the culling activity need to be extremely careful to ensure they operate only on land controlled by the Forestry Commission.

11.3 The Forestry Commission will respond to private householders embedded in the forest where the householder needs our help (needs as opposed to wants) to trap nuisance animals that are posing a significant threat to that householder on a regular basis.

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- 11.4 **Road Casualty Boar.** The Forestry Commission will deal with road casualty boar adjacent to FC land in the same way as for wild deer. If a road casualty boar is reported elsewhere within a mile of Forestry Commission land where the boar is known to be injured, alive, and still on the verge of the public highway, Forestry Commission staff will deal with such incidents at the request of the Police, providing the Police are present at the time. If a road casualty boar is reported on a public road away from FC land and the animal is dead, FC staff will politely decline any request to attend (this is again the same policy as for wild deer). Any injured animal that has moved on to private land away from the public highway must not be dealt with by Forestry Commission staff.
- 11.5 **Poaching.** The unauthorised use of firearms on the public forest estate is illegal and will not be tolerated. The Forestry Commission will report incidents of poaching and / or armed trespass to the local Police and liaise frequently on the issue of poaching. Night shooting is not practiced by Forestry Commission staff in the Forest of Dean – and thus it is very likely that any shots fired in the forest during the night are by people who have no authority to be in the woods. If shots are heard by the public in the heart of the forest at night the recommendation is to inform the Police. It should be noted at this stage that night shooting is legal in many circumstances and private land-owners on the boundary of the forest may well be under-taking perfectly legal activity with firearms at night on their own land.

12.0 Mitigating the Risks Associated with Living with Feral Wild Boar

- 12.1 The current agreed policy calls for the boar population to be managed to 90 or fewer animals – not eradication of the boar - on the public forest estate. There is also a likelihood that with current resources the population will steadily increase. Therefore there is a need for people to live alongside boar safely. Steps can be taken to reduce the risk of adverse impacts between feral wild boar and people – acknowledging implicitly that every individual living, working and visiting the forest can and will make their own decisions regarding their safety and the level of risk they are willing to take. There are two sets of actions that the Forestry Commission will undertake. The first set of actions relates to managing the population and endeavouring to limit the growth of that population. The second set of actions are about the provision of information to both the resident community and visitors.
- 12.2 Key to managing risks is to have the knowledge to make informed decisions. The vast majority of the community living in and visiting the Forest of Dean are aware that feral wild boar are living in the forest (see paras 8.2 and 8.3).

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12.3 Awareness of the presence of boar is not the same as awareness of the potential dangers associated with them. The Forestry Commission will therefore continue to place signs and appropriate messages at the primary points at which visitors to the forest access the forest. All groups requesting permission from the Forestry Commission to use the public forest estate in the Forest of Dean will be provided with a short fact sheet for inclusion in that group's risk assessment. Forest Holidays reception staff have been provided with a fact sheet and this can be made more widely available on request of holiday establishments embedded within the forest. Although local media reports about the boar can be unhelpful through sensationalising the issue, they do serve the fundamentally important job of raising awareness amongst the local community that boar are present and can cause injury to dogs and people.

12.4 The key messages to impart to those living in and using the forest are:

- **Please do not feed the boar either in your garden or in the forest** – feeding the boar encourages the boar to interact with people, increasing the risk of an adverse incident / attack. Feeding the boar in your garden may encourage the boar to search out other gardens where the householders are not as tolerant or may feel threatened by their presence. Feeding the boar at picnic areas encourages the boar to come back repeatedly and forage for food causing a high risk of incidents involving children and visitors to the forest.
- **Please keep dogs under close control or on a lead.** This is a Forestry Commission by-law requirement, but is directly relevant to boar as it is primarily loose running dogs that have been attacked by the boar – primarily defending their young.
- **If boar are blocking your way, you are advised to retreat** and find an alternative path. Unlike deer, rabbits or to a lesser degree sheep, the boar will not necessarily run away on your approach – they may well stand their ground and if they feel threatened adult males may well charge at you.

12.5 Many private houses and gardens within the forest are fenced against free roaming sheep. Boar require more robust fences and gates to ensure that they are fenced out of properties. The Deer Initiative provides recommendations for fence specifications to exclude boar from private properties (see www.wild-boar.org.uk). Fencing the boar into the forest is not a feasible option either on a large scale (the whole forest) or on an enclosure by enclosure basis. One of the important features of the forest, wooded areas and forest waste, is its openness and easy accessibility. This would be compromised if fencing was erected to

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enclose boar. There may thus be a need to get the approval of the Inclosure Commissioners and Commoners Association before fencing to control the movement of feral wild boar – if such a route was agreed.

12.6 Feral wild boar like to lie up in thick cover. We currently do not have sufficient knowledge to know where the boar prefer to be when giving birth or nursing young litters. It is possible that over a period of time the vegetation along main walking and cycling tracks could be managed so that there is no, or very limited preferred cover close to the busiest linear routes. That might reduce the incidents of people coming into contact with young family groups at the time when the adults are likely to be most defensive and thus aggressive.

12.7 The subject of road signs advising motorists of the presence of wild boar has been raised a number of times. Forest roads are a hotspot for road traffic accidents involving deer, boar and sheep. The issue of whether a forest wide speed limit, new road signs or other measures to reduce the number of road traffic accidents in the forest is a matter for the Highway Authority who keep the issue under review.

13.0 **Research Work**

13.1 Research on feral wild boar around the world has been undertaken for many years to improve our general knowledge of the species and how they react in different settings and to different control methods. Direct links between other country's experiences and the Forest of Dean can be made, but only with care.

13.2 The current research needs in the Forest of Dean are:

- Population census methodology: As a matter of some urgency we need a simple, reliable method of estimating the population size so that we can model the population dynamic and accordingly set accurate and defensible cull levels.
- Population tracking: Work in Penyard and Chase, two relatively small woods has shown that the boar are constantly moving and not holding on to territories. Does this pattern hold true in the core of the forest where a much greater area is available for the animals? If we had a better handle on the range movements of the boar as a whole, and specific sounders we will be able to improve our effectiveness in managing that population.

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- Trapping: Work has been commissioned to review the whole process of trapping the wild boar to improve the efficiency of the cull.
- Public perceptions of wild boar research carried out independently by – Dr John Dutton and Hayley Clayton, University of Worcester. Has looked at both local community and visitor perceptions of the boar through a self-completion questionnaire. Initial analysis has been provided to the Forestry Commission and incorporated into this management plan. Real benefits will come if the study is repeated every second year and changes mapped as a trend which can be linked back to key events / changes to strategy in intervening periods. This will have real benefits in future revisions to this plan, and being responsive to the communities views.
- The management of wild boar in the forest would benefit from a much better understanding of the boar's habitat requirements and carrying capacities. How many animals can be supported before they seek alternative areas? What are preferred areas and why? Is there a vegetation management regime that can make some areas preferred and some areas not preferred so can manage distribution and reduce risk of damage to amenity grasslands?
- At the current population densities it is not thought that the boar are having a negative impact upon the ecology of the forest, or indeed any particular rare or endangered species. However, further research may be useful to study the impacts of boar on the habitat over a longer time-scale – in part so that any negative aspects associated with increasing numbers can be identified early.

13.2 To facilitate the research work, the Forestry Commission will continue to:

- Collect DNA, jaw and uterus from culled feral wild boar for study by the research agencies, FERA and / or Forest Research. The DNA samples can be used to study the size, origin and interrelationships between boar groups over time which will aid our understanding of the population dynamics. Jaw samples provides a reliable methodology for understanding age dynamics in a population and can be used to predict population sizes. The uterous samples provide researchers with an opportunity to study reproductive rates – which again aids population dynamic studies.
- Inspect carcasses for signs of Trychonella, Classical Swine Fever and TB as per Ops Instruction No 24. Carcass inspection by trained Forestry Commission staff is the most reliable means of identifying disease in wild populations of boar, and is standard practice for deer.

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14.0 Consultation Arrangements and Approvals

14.1 The draft management plan will be circulated to interested parties for comment. Interested parties will include, but not be limited to:

- The Verderers of the Forest of Dean
- Forest of Dean District Council (contact Cllr Terry Hale, Chair Scrutiny Committee);
- Parish & Town Councils that include public forest estate land in the area covered by the plan;
- The Deer Initiative;
- University of Worcester (contact Dr John Dutton);
- The Commoners Association
- Dean Forest Voice
- DEFRA
- Natural England

14.2 Comments will be collated and text ammended as appropriate prior to a final draft being submitted to the Verderers of the Forest of Dean for their approval.

14.3 This document is an internal document to guide the work of the Forestry Commission in the Forest of Dean. It will be available on request to any individual or organisation that requests a copy.

Appendices:

Appendix One: Map of the public forest estate covered by the management plan.

Appendix Two: Ops Instruction No 24

Appendix Three:

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