Perth Project and 2018 Tahr Hunting Season – Adams Wilderness Area

Updated 2/03/2018

Background/Context

A programme of work is underway in a 12,000 hectare block within the Perth Valley (South Westland) to test and refine an approach to completely remove possums from large areas, and prevent them from re-establishing. The work will also seek to develop this predator management approach for ship rats and stoats.

The project is being carried-out as a collaboration between DOC, Zero Invasive Predators Ltd (ZIP), and Predator Free 2050 Ltd.

If successful, the approach will have significant beneficial outcomes for native plants and animals. It could also negate the need for the repeated use of landscape-scale aerial 1080 to control these predators here and elsewhere in New Zealand, and help pave the way for a predator-free New Zealand.

ZIP staff are already working full-time in the research area installing infrastructure – i.e. routes, temporary bivvies, and radio and satellite communication. Later, the team will install traps and detection devices. The project will include the use of aerial 1080, which will include the aerial application of prefeed bait starting in early May 2018 (subject to approval of DOC and the Medical Officer of Health).

Unfortunately, this programme of work has the potential to disrupt the recreational hunting experience of parties in four of the 2018 balloted tahr hunting areas in the Adams Wilderness Area – i.e. the Barlow River, Perverse Creek, Teichelmann Creek and Abel Lake.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide further details about the anticipated impacts of the research on this season's tahr hunting experience. We will update this document in response to any further questions.

Questions and Answers

1. ***Where are the boundaries of the research area and the area expected to be treated with aerial 1080 in relation to the four hunting areas?***

   The attached map shows the location of the research area, the indicative area to be treated (with prefeed and toxin), the four approved tahr hunting landing sites, Scone and Nolans huts, and the three temporary bivvies.

   The boundary of the treatment area will be refined in the coming weeks. The actual application for permission to carry out the 1080 operation will cover a slightly larger area to allow for helicopters to manoeuvre to apply the baits within the treatment area.

2. ***How often are helicopters used to support the research during the ballot season?***

   In general, helicopters are already being used to transport staff to and from the research area approximately every four days. They are generally flown to Scone Hut and the locations of the temporary bivvies (which have yet to be installed, but are expected to be by the end of March).

   Helicopters will also be used to transport equipment to sites that will sometimes be above the tree line.

   Helicopters will be particularly conspicuous during the two separate applications of prefeed and one application of toxin, because in order to complete each application in one day, we expect that up to five helicopters could be used at a time.

3. ***Where will the research staff be working?***

   Staff are already on the ground in the research area, for seven days per week, establishing temporary routes and infrastructure. Staff always wear hi-vis clothing when working in the area.

   Most of their work is in forest, but their activities also extend to the boundary between the alpine scrub and tussock grassland (the “scrubline”). From time to time staff may need to camp above the treeline, and traverse the tussock-grasslands and associated scree and bluffs.

   In general, we anticipate that staff will rarely need to camp at or otherwise be present at the approved tahr hunting landing sites. We will do all we can to avoid working above the scrubline during the during the ballot season (although the conditions of the 1080 operation may also require some activity there).

4. ***What will the staff be doing during the ballot season?***

   During the ballot season, staff will be installing and monitoring devices to both detect the presence of predators, including traps, chew cards and cameras. We'll provide updates of activities and progress on our website.

   Staff will also be monitoring non-target species (such as kea).

5. ***Are staff allowed rifles when on their trips during the 2018 ballot season?***

   No, ZIP managers will not allow staff to carry or use rifles in the research area during the 2018 ballot season, including into parts that are outside the Adams Wilderness Area.
   Just like any member of the public (excluding people who have obtained a tahr block), staff are legally not allowed to fly rifles or other hunting weapons into a wilderness area.

6. ***When is the earliest date prefeed will be applied? How many flying days will this take?***

   The first application of prefeed will be carried out no earlier than 7 May. We expect that this application will take one day (using up to five helicopters), as will the second application of prefeed, and the application of toxin.

7. ***Can you confirm no toxin (1080) will be laid before the start of the first period of the ballot schedule (i.e. on 28 April)?***

   Yes, no toxin will be laid before 19 May.

8. ***When exactly will toxin be dropped in relation to the ballot periods?***

   No toxin will be applied prior to the 19th May; therefore toxin will not be present during ballot periods 1-3. The application of toxin scheduled to be carried out on 19 May falls within ballot period 4; however this has the potential to be delayed if weather conditions are unfavourable (in which case it could be carried out during period 5, 6 or 7). We will include all remaining ballot holders in our 24 hour notification list, meaning they will get 24 hours' notice of the pending toxin application.

   If a second application of toxin is required, this would be carried out after the ballot periods have ended.

9. ***Do you know that actual date for 1080 drop after the 19th May?***

   The first non-toxic prefeed application will be carried out no earlier than 7 May. To ensure maximum uptake of the prefeed by target species, we will need to wait at least 6 days between each application – meaning that the second application of prefeed will occur no earlier than 13 May, and the application of toxin no earlier than 19 May.

Unfortunately, weather conditions have the potential to delay both the two prefeed applications and the toxin application (each of which requires a weather 'window' of three fine nights to proceed).

Given this context, we are unable to confirm an exact date for the 1080 application. We will include all remaining ballot holders in our 24 hour notification list, meaning they will get 24 hours' notice of the pending toxin application.

10. Why was this timing selected for the operation?

As this research is an attempt to completely remove possums (and potentially rats) from the treatment area (and then keep them out), it is extremely important that the sequence of aerial operations is not significantly disrupted or delayed by weather events.

Aerial predator management operations typically target the colder times of year when the target species are most under stress, through reduced natural food and limited breeding. In addition, this needs to be balanced with getting the right fine/calm weather to undertake the work. Experience tells us that weather on the West Coast is highly variable in terms of rain and wind from late winter right through spring; therefore to maximise the chance of a successful eradication, this aerial operation is proposed to be carried out during late autumn and early winter when the weather patterns are at their most settled.

11. *Will prefeed and toxin be sown over the camps at the approved tahr hunting landing sites?*

The precise boundary of the treatment area is still being finalised. It will reflect the need to target all potential predator habitat, and ensure safe and practicable helicopter flight paths, and ensure public health. Potentially all of the camps will be within the treatment area.

The proposed boundaries will be in the application for the treatment, which is scheduled to be sent to DOC and the Medical Officer of Health on 16 March 2018.

DOC and the Medical Officer of Health may set conditions to any approval of the 1080 operation over where bait can and cannot be applied and regarding water supply matters, including at the campsites and in waterways (e.g. if requested by hunters, water could be supplied for their use).

12. *Any other impacts that we should be aware of?*

A fixed-wing aircraft will be operating in the area on the days of application of baits, and immediately after, to track non-target species (e.g. kea) that have been radio-tagged to measure any impact of the treatment on them. The aircraft will be operating at a much higher altitude than the helicopters.

13. ***Have you met with the hunting community about the Perth Project?***

Yes. We have consulted with the Game Animal Council, some West Coast holders of wild animal recovery operation concessions and local hunting guides, and the New Zealand Deerstalkers Association.

14. ***Have you considered monitoring any impact of the 1080 operation on tahr?***

Yes. We are currently exploring this with the Game Animal Council. Any field work to enable the monitoring (e.g. catching and radio collaring tahr) is likely to require helicopter activity above the tree line. We anticipate this being undertaken before the start of the ballot periods, with the monitoring itself being undertaken by fixed wing plane immediately after each bait application.