

Backing Hunters

ACT is announcing a plan for hunting and conservation, one that funds the volunteers already maintaining our huts and trap lines, puts hunters in charge of managing game animals within firm conservation limits, and reopens the backcountry New Zealanders already own.

New Zealand's laws still treat game animals as pests to be controlled, and in national parks, exterminated as far as possible. They fail to properly recognise hunters for their added value to conservation, game animal management and back country maintenance contribution, sidelining a large, skilled, and motivated workforce already in the hills. It is clear DOC cannot manage that country on its own. ACT's plan will treat hunters and the animals they value as part of the solution, not the problem, placing delivery and decision-making in their hands.

PART ONE — HUNTERS IN CHARGE OF GAME ANIMALS

01 Empowering hunter led management

Game animals on conservation land are managed by the one agency whose default is to control or exterminate them. The Game Animal Council was created to give hunters a real say but was handed a seat at the table rather than a hand on the levers.

ACT will transfer responsibility for managing game animals on conservation land from DOC to the Game Animal Council, meaning hunters will set the targets rather than just being consulted. This will include full funding for all their current and proposed duties.

02 Protect our most valued herds

The law still treats introduced game animals as pests to be exterminated "as far as possible," and treasured herds like Stewart

Island whitetail deer and Himalayan tahr have no plan recognising their value. The current Government is already recognising valued species like Wapiti and Sika, we should continue this work.

ACT will recognise game animal and game-bird species as valued natural resources to be sustainably managed in relevant legislation, and designate New Zealand's most valued game herds as Herds of Special Interests, starting with Stewart Island whitetail deer.

PART TWO — FUNDING & DELIVERY

03 Fund the volunteers who maintain the backcountry

DOC manages over 950 huts and 15,000 km of tracks but is failing to deliver on their upkeep. DOC faces a 30% maintenance shortfall and has issued more than 2,300 closure alerts since 2021. Hunting, tramping, and conservation groups already restore huts and maintain tracks at a fraction of the cost using volunteers and common sense but survive hand- to-mouth on annual discretionary grants.

ACT will require DOC to give the first right of funding to community groups, if they can provide a competitive option. This would allow for multi-year contracts, giving Kiwis a hand in maintaining and protecting the back country amenities they enjoy.

04 Reward hunters for pest control

Recreational hunters are already in the hills running trap lines and removing predators, but the new nature-credit market does not recognise their efforts, and they are routinely shut out of pest-control decisions affecting them.

ACT will open the Voluntary Nature Credits Market to accredited hunting groups so they can earn biodiversity credits for verified results and ensure the New Zealand Deerstalkers Association (NZDA) and Game Animal Council (GAC) are formally represented in predator removal decision-making.

PART THREE — ACCESS TO THE BACK COUNTRY

05 Fairer venison recovery

DOC's arbitrary rules force commercial venison recovery operators to use expensive turbine helicopters. Aircraft safety should be the Civil Aviation Authority's job, not DOC's. Current permits also let operators strip out the trophy tags that recreational hunters value most.

ACT will leave safety to the CAA and stop DOC from dictating which helicopters recovery operators can use. ACT will allow the GAC to restrict commercial take by animal gender when necessary, so operators and recreational hunters share a well-managed resource fairly.

06 Open the backcountry from the air

For rugged backcountry like Fiordland a helicopter is the only time efficient way in, yet huge areas are closed by no-fly and no-landing zones, defined by legacy lines on a map with no clear conservation or safety reasoning.

ACT will allow the Game Animal Council to designate sensible, accessible landing sites and require DOC to adopt clear, public and uniform testing processes for simplistic assessment.

07 Making hunting access a priority

Much of New Zealand's public land is hard to access. Securing access for hunters isn't a priority for the body responsible.

ACT will direct the Outdoor Access Commission to prioritise access for hunting in its work programme.

PART FOUR — PROTECTING LAWFUL HUNTING

08 Stopping dangerous interference with hunting

Hunters acting safely and within the law can be deliberately obstructed by people who step into the line of fire to stop a shot being taken. This is dangerous and a deliberate disruption of a lawful activity, yet no specific offence addresses it.

ACT will create an infringement offence for deliberately standing in the line of fire of a lawful hunter, deterring dangerous sabotage and keeping the backcountry safe for everyone.

09 Protecting game bird shooters from harassment

Drones or helicopters can be used by activists to deliberately scatter or flush out game birds. This disturbs the birds and often is used simply to try and sabotage a lawful hunt. There is currently little legal remedy to deal with this.

ACT will create an infringement offence for harassing game bird shooters with drones or helicopters, protecting both the birds and the hunters who value them.

ACT's plan backs the people already in the hills, the hunters, volunteers and clubs who look after the land we all own, to manage it for conservation, recreation and the regions, instead of locking them out.



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