Squirrel Control Plan Guide

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## Revision History

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Date  | Version  | Comments  | Sections updated  |
| 20.01.2022  | Draft  |   |   |
| 01.02.2022  | V1  | Reformatted into FC standard template |  Aesthetic changes only |
| 23.02.2023 | V2 | Content review | All, minor text changes |

## Introduction

Grey squirrels have spread rapidly since their introduction into Great Britain in the late 19th century, and Ireland in the early 20th century. They have a significant impact on woodland biodiversity and the native red squirrel (Sciurus vulgaris). Grey squirrels have displaced red squirrels throughout most of England and Wales, central and southeast Scotland, and parts of Northern Ireland, through competition and disease.

Grey squirrels pose a threat to the sustainable management of woodlands through the damage they cause to trees by bark stripping. This may lead to a loss of particularly vulnerable tree species (e.g., beech) which may be accompanied by a decline in associated fungal and invertebrate fauna. In some areas damage can act as a disincentive to the creation of new woodlands for timber because it reduces the value of the trees. In many areas of the UK, grey squirrels are unaffected by predation and therefore targeted control is often necessary to reduce their impact on woodlands and biodiversity.

To support the management of woodlands and landscapes and to reduce adverse impacts to landowner’s objectives, grey squirrel populations need to be managed.

Mitigating grey squirrel impacts effectively requires continued effort. A [Squirrel Control Plan (SCP) available on Operations Note 60 page on GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/management-requirements-for-woodland-supplement-ws3-squirrel-control-and-management-operations-note-60) is a useful aid to the process of identifying resource requirements, monitoring effort and culls, and recording changes in impact over time. This guidance has been developed to assist landowners and managers of woodlands to complete an approved plan using the template supplied. This guidance and template have been developed to support the application for Countryside Stewardship WD2/WS3 Squirrel supplement.

## How to use this guide

If completed in full, the Plan will meet the requirements of both the UK Forestry Standard and Forestry Commission WS3 grant schemes. It can however be used in any situation requiring an SCP. Each section of the template is numbered, and the guidance here follows the same numbering to allow quick and easy cross-referencing.

It is important to note that this guidance is not a manual or handbook on squirrel management. Recent guidance can be found at <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/research/management-of-grey-squirrels/>.

Although the Plan template can be used by those with little or no woodland/squirrel control experience additional support and guidance will be available from Forestry Commission Deer Officers, or potentially from forestry consultants and others.

To be eligible for WS3, the squirrel control plan needs to be agreed with a Deer Officer in the relevant Forestry Commission area team and become active at the start of year 1.

## Developing a Squirrel Control plan (SCP)

Landowners should establish their woodland objectives and identify the current grey squirrel pressure and their likely impact on these objectives. An SCP does not need to be a complicated document. Clearly the larger the area or the more diverse the land use and management objectives, the more detail will be required in the plan.

The template provides enough information for a ‘stand-alone’ document, but ideally the sections relating specifically to squirrel control will be linked to a more comprehensive woodland or estate plan.

The SCP should be developed by the landowner / manager but must include discussions with those who are expected to be delivering the control works and hopefully with neighbors.

Ideally the control of squirrels should be considered as part of the woodland management operations rather than an unrelated activity. Those undertaking the control should have a clear understanding of the objectives and the part they are expected to play in delivering them.

# Guidance notes

The Plan Template has been designed to be used for an estate, farm or woodland area. Plans should be written in conjunction with the woodland or overall management plans for a holding.

Note that the space available for information in each section is not an indication of its intended extent, feel free to expand/condense any part or add pages where appropriate.

## Contacts

Details of ownership and contact information should include those most relevant to the holding and control of squirrels.

## Location and area of holding

Record

* a central grid reference of the woodland(s) or of the estate as appropriate.
* the area (ha) of woodland in Countryside Stewardship
* the total area (ha) of woodland on the holding
* the total area of the holding

The location of the area included in the plan should be marked on a 1:50,000 or 1:25,000 scale map which shows key location features such as the woodland(s) and the boundary of the holding. Maps should be appended to the main plan.

## Grey Squirrel Impacts – Starting situation and trends

This section is to establish the status of squirrels currently present on the holding.

Current grey squirrel impacts should be recorded simply as high, medium, or low, with an indication of current trend – i.e., are impacts decreasing, stable, or increasing.

In the comments section place any note relevant to the current situation at both holding level and landscape level, with an indication of the assessment method(s) used to estimate impacts.

## Red Squirrel/Pine Marten Presence

If the scheme is in or adjacent to an area where red squirrels are present, then this should be highlighted at this point to ensure that the actions proposed within the plan will not threaten red squirrel populations (which are protected by law)

Similarly in areas where pine martens are present this will determine the type of control appropriate to prevent harming them.

## Obstacles and challenges to achieving effective control

This section identifies issues that may cause conflicts or challenges that affect appropriate control. These issues should be assessed and wherever possible workable solutions should be described. The intention of the WS3 incentive is that improvements to grey squirrel control are achieved and obstacles to enhancing efficient control are removed.

Control for the purposes of tree protection aims to reduce grey squirrel numbers to a level where damage is tolerable. Control must be carried out leading up to or during the period when most damage to trees normally occurs (May–September). The most effective period for trapping is usually just before this period in late winter or early spring, when the availability of natural foods is lowest. However, a large seed crop in the previous autumn, or feed put out for pheasants, may influence the effectiveness of trapping and therefore the choice of timing for squirrel control. Completing control too early in spring on the other hand may risk damage occurring later by grey squirrels recolonising from neighboring areas.

## Impact Monitoring

In this section the location of monitoring transects should be recorded giving wood name and transect start point grid reference. An explanation of the survey method and a survey template is available on the [Operations Note 60 page on GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/management-requirements-for-woodland-supplement-ws3-squirrel-control-and-management-operations-note-60). To satisfy the requirements of [WD2](https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/woodland-improvement-wd2) and [WS3](https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/ws3-squirrel-control-and-management) it is expected that impact assessments are carried out before the end of years 1, and at years 3 and 5.

Collection and monitoring of data and evidence is important and can be used to justify culling actions to third parties if required as well as to inform future management decisions and methods. Training sessions may be run by or for the Forestry Commission in this methodology if there is sufficient demand.

## Squirrel Control Strategy, Effort and Method

The WD2/WS3 supplement has been developed with the expectation that additional time spent culling each year will lead to monitored reductions in impacts. Across a landholding, increasing culling effort can significantly affect future woodland sustainability and resilience.

The time required to cull high level populations must not be underestimated, nor should the total period over which a high culling effort will be required both because of immigration, and the fact that smaller numbers of grey squirrels can become harder to cull. Even after populations are reduced, the culling effort (time) (to sustain lower population levels) can remain as high as it was previously, despite fewer animals being culled.

For all the rows, give the expected number of person days that will be dedicated to each. One person spending a minimum of a 6-hour day would be regarded as a “person day”, with pro-rata calculations for a different number of hours or persons involved. Note that providing evidence of the effort expended is a mandatory part of WS3.

There are two trap method rows, lethal and live catch. For each describe the trap type(s), timing of trapping, and approximate number of traps to be deployed.

For the shooting rows briefly describe the intended method and how many person days will be committed.

In many situations trapping and shooting should be used concurrently.

For red squirrels briefly describe any involvement in enhancing their population.

There are recognised qualifications in squirrel control available. It is recommended that culling coordinators and ideally all controllers possess these qualifications and have a suitable level of experience.

Wherever possible discussion with neighboring holdings should be occurring to increase the effectiveness of control being undertaken. Record in the control plan where this is likely and identify situations that may cause conflicts with objectives.

Control effort, the number of outings, and the number of grey squirrels culled will all be collated on the [squirrel cull and effort record available on the Operations Note 60 page of GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/management-requirements-for-woodland-supplement-ws3-squirrel-control-and-management-operations-note-60).

## Annually reviewed cull and trend summary

In this table, record the expected cull numbers and the actual cull targets reached. These should be updated annually. Note that the expected cull is aspirational only but should be seen as a desired minimum.

A trend or score should be added annually in the bottom of the table.

Annual reviews should occur, and cull targets re-assessed in relation to the impact assessments and past culling effort.

A separate squirrel cull and effort record [(available on the Operations Note 60 page of GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/management-requirements-for-woodland-supplement-ws3-squirrel-control-and-management-operations-note-60)).should be used to record culls and is mandatory for WS3. The template records dates of control effort and squirrels culled by number and sex. The completed template should be submitted electronically to the FC on an annual basis.

## Additional elements

There may be additional elements particular to your site / holding / estate that will need to be discussed. Your woodland officer may wish to place comments here for future reference.

## Appendices

A range of appendices may be appended to the Squirrel Control plan. Those marked \* are compulsory elements. **Note:** For WS3 a full set of Appendices is not required during the application process however, if you have existing relevant records/data that you would like to submit electronically then please do so.

The compulsory elements (marked \*) must be in place before the end of year 1.

* boundary Map
* impact assessments Year 1, 3, and 5\*. An impact assessment will need to be completed to support the plan in year 1, and reassessments will need to occur at years 3 and 5. (See guidance on recording and carrying out these surveys)
* map of monitoring transects\*
* annual Cull/Effort data\* will need to be collated from the start of the plan and submitted to the FC at years 1, 3 and 5 for WS3
* past cull data (before start of this plan, if available)
* past Impact assessments (before the start of this plan, if available)
* squirrel control and associated risk assessments
* formal Control Agreement or Contract, if applicable.

## Review

The Plan should be discussed, reviewed, and updated annually. The plan should be set for at least 5 years but could be longer, with the expectation that it will continue to be used in an evolving form indefinitely.