



# Groups unanimous: urgent action and investment needed to tackle out-of-control browsing pests

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Farmers, foresters and conservationists are all calling on political parties to commit to controlling the large mobs of browsing pests such as deer, goats, pigs, and wallabies now common across New Zealand.

Federated Farmers, the New Zealand Institute of Forestry, and Forest & Bird wrote to major political parties this week asking for targeted funding to bring about a reset in wild browsing pest numbers. A copy of the letter, as well as images and videos from around the country, [is available here](#).

Publicly available data shows that these pest populations have been expanding in range across native habitats and primary production land, with reports of high and damaging numbers all around New Zealand.

Federated Farmers President Wayne Langford says: “This is a serious problem for a lot of farmers across the country. These wild animals are consuming huge amounts of grass and undermining efforts to improve environmental outcomes.

“We’ve been getting regular reports of 30 or more wild deer roaming across farmland eating the pasture – and a deer can eat the same amount of grass in a day as two sheep. It’s the same issue with other pests too.”

In South Canterbury, a farmer recently eradicated more than 2,300 wallabies in a single cull. Without adequate control measures on the neighbouring conservation land, similarly large culls will need to continue regularly.

“There will always be an important role for recreational hunting in New Zealand, but the current increase in pest numbers shows that recreational hunting alone can’t adequately control these pests.

“That’s why we are calling for the next Government to commit to making a targeted injection of funding for the Department of Conservation to increase their pest control efforts across the country.

“We know that the Government’s budgets are tight right now, but the reality is that reduced or deferred spending on pest control will just see higher costs in the future as wild animal populations continue to grow,” says Mr Langford.

The forest sector is spending millions on wild browsing animal control, with reports of 1,400 goats shot over 400 hectares in just two months on the East Coast, says New Zealand Institute of Forestry president James Treadwell.

“Much higher Government funding is needed to reset numbers to a lower level. Without adequate pest management, New Zealand is going to be unable to plant steeper sites and meet the Climate Change Commission forecast of 300,000 hectares of new native forest. This could result in failure to meet future international climate change commitments, and further increase the reliance on purchasing international carbon credits at great cost to every New Zealander,” says Mr Treadwell.

“Better wild browsing pest animal control now would allow climate goals to be

achieved, erodible hills to be protected by canopy cover, and more natives to be planted.”

Forest & Bird chief executive Nicola Toki says without a reset of numbers for pest populations such as deer, New Zealand risks native forest collapse. “Deer, goats, and pigs are wrecking native habitats now. Even worse, because they eat palatable tree species before those plants have a chance to grow, empty forest understoreys are endangering future forests.

“We need New Zealand’s native forests. We need these critical carbon sinks in the fight against climate change. We need them to prevent flooding and erosion. And we need them because, without forests, where are native birds supposed to go?” says Ms Toki.

“I’m a hunter myself, but although recreational hunting is one tool in the toolbox here, it will never be enough by itself. This is a problem that’s been decades in the making and we need Government to front up and tackle it now.”

The three groups have asked the National Party, the Labour Party, the Act Party, the Green Party, Te Pāti Māori and New Zealand First to make a pre-election commitment to significant funding for targeted wild animal control to protect agriculture, forestry, and native forests in a changing climate.

Notes:

- Department of Conservation monitoring has shown that [feral deer, goats, and pigs colonised a third more conservation land in just eight years.](#)
- Forest & Bird has previously analysed other public data to show that [nearly all areas of indigenous vegetation, and two thirds of primary production land, has at least one species of wild ungulate](#) (hooved animals such as deer, goats and pigs).
- A Forest & Bird report [Protecting our Natural Ecosystems’ Carbon Sinks](#) looked into ongoing damage by introduced browsing pests, which

causes native habitats to bleed stored carbon.

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