

Job Description - Lead Wildlife Manager (PB3)

Job summary

Wildlife management sits at the heart of nature recovery, sustainable forestry and forest resilience. It protects biodiversity, enables the next generation of timber, and restores balance to ecosystems that can no longer regulate themselves. This role leads the wildlife management function across the >250,000 hectares of the nation's forests managed by Forestry England. Of this, around 68,000 hectares are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest and 59,000 hectares are ancient woodland. These landscapes support significant populations of native and non-native ungulates—including muntjac, roe, fallow, sika and red deer—as well as feral wild boar.

Evidence shows that deer pressure on woodlands has risen over recent decades, with approximately 33% of English woodlands now negatively affected, up from 24% in the early 2000s. In addition to deer, non-native grey squirrels create substantial challenges for woodland recovery, causing damage such as bark stripping, alongside challenging our native wildlife. With the UK lacking its native top predators, active wildlife management remains essential to replicate natural ecological functions and maintain balanced, healthy woodland ecosystems. This intervention is vital to enable nature recovery, support sustainable forestry, and maintain the long-term resilience of the forests we manage.

This role provides strategic leadership for wildlife management across England, overseeing more than 70 dedicated staff. The post holder will act as Forestry England's subject matter expert within the National Operations team and will report directly to the Head of Environment and Nature Recovery.

Key responsibilities & accountabilities

- Strategic lead for wildlife management including delivering the vision for wildlife management which encapsulates population management, partnership working, lethal control operations, firearms procedures, venison production and contract management, best practice, training, health and safety.
- Develop national policy through reviewing and ensuring Forestry England's Policy, Practice, and Guidance documents are fit for purpose and up-to-date with the latest evidence and thinking.
- Provide expertise on a wide range of wildlife management situations with regards to firearms law, safety standards and legal compliance.
- Provide leadership for Forestry England's wildlife management staff. This includes offering direct support to colleagues, organising audits, ensuring compliance with deer larder standards and overseeing firearms authorities. The role will also chair the Forestry England Firearms and Wildlife Management Standards Panel and lead on implementing its recommendations. In addition, the role will drive work to increase diversity and improve representation of all communities within wildlife management roles across the organisation.
- Work closely with colleagues across the Forestry Commission, and engage with other DEFRA departments and key stakeholders as appropriate, these will include Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, Forestry & Land Scotland, Non-Governmental Organisations and other stakeholder groups.
- Responsible for maximising brand and reputation opportunities, and managing risks, associated with Forestry England's wildlife management work directly with the national engagement team, and promoting collaboration at a local level.
- Ensure Forestry England are at the forefront of wildlife management, ensuring best practice is continually updated, technical advances are utilised, and novel methods are explored.

And any other tasks, reasonably requested by your line manager.

Skills, knowledge & experience

Essential professional and technical experience

- Proven leadership experience and strong technical capability, including extensive team building, change management, project management and budget oversight. Able to apply technical expertise to inform decision-making and to influence, motivate and inspire teams to adopt new ways of working.
- Proven professional-level technical expertise in wildlife population management. This could include Deer Management Qualifications Level 1 & 2, managing large-scale culling programmes, understanding population monitoring, delivering the British Quality Wild Venison Standard, and overseeing deer larder operations.
- Strong experience in contract management, ideally within a wildlife management context such as deer management or venison contracts.
- Knowledge of wildlife and firearms legislation, including relevant statutory requirements and best-practice guidance.
- Ability to influence and collaborate effectively with a wide range of stakeholders and organisations, each with diverse mandates and ambitions relating to land management and the natural environment.

Desirable professional and technical experience

- Experience of visitor management, forestry operations, the technical aspects of timber production and forest management, protected species conservation, forest planning and operational site planning.
- Strong writing and presentation skills, combined with an ability to engage a wide range of stakeholders.

Qualifications

Desirable

- A degree in a relevant subject and/or similar levels of professional experience.

Additional information

This post will involve dealing with contacts across England, and travel with overnight stays. The use of Microsoft Teams video software is encouraged to reduce travel; however the postholder will be expected to regularly travel in accordance with the needs of the business and the demands of the post. The duties of this post require the applicant to have a full current driving licence that enables them to drive in the UK. Forestry England is willing to consider any reasonable adjustments and/or proposals put forward by an applicant that would allow them to do this work by other means.

An induction period will be tailored to the skills and experience of the successful candidate.