



Licensed Hunting

Code of Practice – Deer Stalking

The hunting of game, deer and other quarry species are amongst the oldest form of forest recreation which continue to be legally enjoyed by many people across the country.

Respecting the traditional nature of this activity and recognising the social, environmental and economic benefits' which hunting can have, Coillte permit certain types of hunting under licence on designated areas of their estate. This is in line with the Companies Recreational Policy and supports the principles of multiple-use forestry.

In managing this activity, Coillte are conscious that if undertaken inappropriately, hunting can have negative implications for the welfare and conservation of certain wildlife species, and can be a potential risk to public safety.

Coillte is fully committed to the principles of sustainable hunting and expect all persons exercising rights to hunt on its lands to do so in accordance with the FSC Irish Forest Stewardship Standard – [FSC Ireland](#). A full copy of this standard is available [on line](#) or by request from any Coillte office.

The future licensing of rights to hunt on Coillte lands rest firmly in manner in which these activities are practiced. In addition to any legal requirements and National guidelines that may be in place relating to hunting, and the conditions of Coillte's licence agreement, this Code of Practice aims to establish the minimum standards expected from all persons engaged in the stalking of deer on Coillte lands.

Hunter Competence

It is Coillte's policy that only persons who have satisfactorily completed an approved, certified hunter competence assessment are permitted to hunt deer on Coillte lands. This is implemented as follows:-

i) Licence Holders and Stalking Permit Holders (full) :- All holders of licences to hunt deer on Coillte lands are required to hold the Hunter Competence Assessment Programme (HCAP) www.deeralliance.ie qualification. All persons nominated to hunt (nominated hunters) under such licences will also require this qualification in order to be issued with a stalking permit for the full duration of the hunting season.

ii) Stalking Permit Holders (restricted) :- Nominated hunters who do not hold the HCAP qualification, but do hold an alternative, approved and accredited hunter qualification can be issued with stalking permit for a maximum period of 2 weeks. A total of two such permits can be issued to an individual during the course of the same hunting season.

In addition to this mandatory requirement, it is incumbent on all responsible hunters to develop and maintain their skills and competencies. Regular practice on approved target ranges, helps maintain firearms proficiency. The zeroing of rifles or other forms of target practice are not permitted on Coillte lands.

Safety

While hunting and using firearms, personal safety and the safety of others, is the responsibility of the hunter. No matter how much experience a hunter may have, they should never be complacent with regard to safety which must be foremost in their minds at all times. **Always expect the unexpected and plan for it!**

i) Firearms and their handling and use

Firearms used for game hunting are lethal weapons capable of killing or causing serious injury. Accidents involving firearms generally occur as a result of either faulty equipment or unsafe handling and use:-

Faulty Equipment:- Firearms should be checked periodically for serviceability and safety by a qualified gunsmith.

All hunters should maintain their firearms in good working order as per the manufacturers guidelines. Regular maintenance and inspections should identify obvious faults. Particular attention should be paid to :-

- Pitting, dents, bulges, rust or other potential weakness or obstructions in the barrel/s.
- Loose actions or non-operating locking mechanisms
- Very sensitive trigger pressures which can often result in accidental discharges during loading and unloading.
- Non-operating safety catches or those that are too light which can be accidentally pushed off by clothing or vegetation.

Never use any firearm if there is the slightest concern over its safety. Have it checked immediately by a competent gunsmith.

Unsafe Handling and Use :- Accidents mainly occur:

- In and around vehicles.
- When loading or unloading the firearm.
- When there is more than one person shooting in the same area.
- While negotiating obstacles with a loaded firearm.
- When a barrel is allowed to become obstructed.

Guidelines for safe rifle handling and use

It is important to adopt and follow a set routine for handling rifles safely in the field.

- Always load the rifle in the same manner with the same number of rounds of ammunition.
- While woodland stalking, it is general practice to carry the rifle with one round in the breech, the magazine full, safety catch applied, and the rifle slung over the shoulder preferably with the barrel forward and upwards, in order that the direction the muzzle is pointing can be seen at all times.
- The trigger should only be touched if you intend to fire or to release spring tension having ensured that the breech is emptied.
- Continually check the safety catch as it can be pushed off accidentally by clothing or vegetation.
- Never take a shot without a solid backstop!** This should be preferably solid earth - trees and bushes are definitely not adequate. Avoid the risk of the bullet being deflected (ricocheting) either before reaching the target or after it.
- Always be aware of the position of roads, pathways, buildings, and areas regularly frequented by the public and never fire in their direction.
- Where more than one hunter is hunting in the same area, high visibility caps or vests should be worn at all times
- When crossing obstacles, gralloching (eviscerating) an animal or climbing into highseats, ensure that the rifle is unloaded, the bolt closed and the safety catch applied. In low light conditions use a finger or torch light to ensure the breech is clear.
- Regularly check the barrel for obstructions such as mud, snow, heather, etc. Sealing the muzzle with insulating tape will prevent objects entering the muzzle.
- Never give or accept a firearm without ensuring the breech is cleared, indicate this by leaving the bolt open.
- In transit to and from the stalking grounds, the chamber and magazine should always be empty, the bolt removed and the rifle enclosed in a slip or case.
- No shot should ever be fired if there is the slightest doubt about safety**

ii) Personal Safety

All hunters are responsible for their own personal safety while hunting on Coillte lands including the provision of appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Common hazards to be aware of and plan for:-

Lone Hunting

While hunting alone, a mobile telephone should be carried at all times, and / or arrangements made with a third party to confirm their safe return.

Hunting in Company

Where more than one hunter is hunting in the same area, high visibility caps or vests must be worn at all times

Hearing Loss

Use of firearms without wearing hearing protection can result in permanent loss of hearing.

Difficult / dangerous terrain

Be aware of the locations of rock outcrops, quarries, rivers, ponds, silt traps, brash, stumps, etc.. Prevent against slips, trips, falls and drowning by avoiding these areas. Risks associated with these hazards increase considerably in hours of darkness, in wet or icy conditions.

Protruding Branches

Be aware of protruding branches when traversing through trees and wear appropriate eye protection.

Forest Operations

All stalkers must comply with all warning signs around forest work sites. Please note:- hunters are not "authorised persons" in this context and such prohibition signs **must never be passed**. Never approach operating machinery.

Adverse Weather Conditions

All stalkers should obtain a local weather forecast before hunting and plan accordingly

Injured animals

Approach all injured animals with care and dispatch safely and humanely without risk of personal injury.

Lacerations

Care must be taken when using knives.

Infectious diseases

All hunters should be aware of potential risks of infectious diseases which may be contracted from handling carcasses of shot quarry or the hunting environment. The more common of these include Leptospirosis (Weil's disease), Lyme disease (Lyme Borreliosis) and Tuberculosis.

It is recommended that all hunters be trained in basic first aid and to carry a first aid kit in their vehicles as part of their standard PPE.

iii) The Safety of Others

In addition to the considerable use of Coillte lands by people engaged in forest operations and other licensed activities, Coillte operate an "open access policy" allowing free pedestrian access to its lands. It is estimated that there are over 8 million day visitors using these lands annually. All hunters must be constantly vigilant for other forest users and be prepared to immediately cease hunting in areas where other users are observed.

- All stalkers should familiarise themselves fully with the hunting area and be constantly aware of the location of roads, pathways, rights of way, buildings, and areas regularly frequented by the public and never fire in their vicinity or in their direction.

- It must be remembered that the sound of a discharging firearm can itself present a potential hazard to other users of the forest, for example, pony trekkers.

- All deer stalkers must erect prohibition notices at all gates and entrances to the hunting area before commencing hunting and remove them on leaving the area. Specific locations for the positioning of these signs may be a condition of the licence agreement. These notices must confirm to the specification outlined in **Fig 1**. The hunters mobile telephone number should be displayed on the sign as well as the time when the hunting is due to cease. It is recommended that a small red flashing strobe light (such as rear bicycle light) be attached to this sign to attract attention.

- All deer stalkers must obtain agreement from the forest manager at least 48 hours in advance of their intention to hunt the lands. Merely providing notification of their intention to hunt is not sufficient. This is in the interests of both public safety and to avoid conflicting activities taking place in the same area which may affect the use and enjoyment of these licensed rights.

iv) Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (HIRA) / Safety Statement

Before commencing hunting it is good practice to undertake a basic HIRA, identifying potential hazards, evaluating the level of risk and determining appropriate measures to mitigate this risk.

Note:- When exercising a licence in a professional capacity it may be a legal requirement to produce a safety statement which includes such a HIRA .

Fig 1. Prohibition Sign – Hunting

(Minimum size of 400mm wide and 600mm high).



Consideration for others

All responsible hunters should have the utmost consideration for forest workers, other forest users and neighbouring landowners, and avoid causing them any undue disturbance or nuisance.

Sustainable Hunting & Animal Welfare

Deer hunting must only be undertaken in accordance with all relevant legislation and any National guidelines that may be in place. Only the number and sex, and species of deer contained in the programmed cull may be killed. All deer hunters must be aware of this programmed cull. Cognisance must also be made of the frequency of hunting to avoid over disturbance of an area.

Coillte require all hunters to maintain and submit cull records of all deer shot on its lands.

The Environment

All responsible hunters should aim to ensure that their hunting does not have any negative impact on the environment.

The release of any animal, the introduction of any plant, or the erection of any structure including signs, highseat, feeders, mineral blocks, etc.. on Coillte lands requires written authorisation of the forest manager. Similarly for the cutting of trees, creation of pathways or any groundwork's.

The carcasses and viscera of all shot animals, cases of all used cartridges or other litter resulting from the hunting activity must be collected removed from Coillte's forest property and disposed of in an appropriate manner.

Animal Welfare

The highest respect must be afforded to all quarry animals. It should be the objective of every responsible hunter to ensure the clean, humane kill, and efficient recovery of all deer shot. All stalkers must only use a licensed firearm of a calibre legally approved for killing deer, and appropriate ammunition with a bullet type designed to expand/deform on impact. It is Coillte's recommendation that a minimum calibre of .240 inches and minimum muzzle energy of 1,700 foot-pounds should be use for killing deer. (i.e. .243 Win using a bullet weighing 100 grains).

All rifles and sights must be correctly "zeroed" or "sighted-in" for a given range. This should be checked on an approved target range on a regular basis, particularly after the firearm receives a service, adjustment or other form of interference, after it is dropped or knocked, or following any un-typically "wild" shot. No responsible stalker should ever use a rifle if there is any doubt over its accuracy.

No responsible stalker should commence stalking without carrying a sufficient number of rounds of ammunition (minimum of 5 rounds) to allow follow-up shots to be taken if required to dispatch a wounded animal.

Legislation

It is the responsibility of every deer stalker to familiarise themselves fully with all legislation relating to their sport and adhere to it at all times.

Insurance

All persons hunting on Coillte lands must have adequate third party public liability insurance with a minimum cover of not less than €6.5 million for any one accident.

Further details of Coillte's insurance requirements can be obtained at www.coillteoutdoors.ie

Remember – The highest level Insurance is not a replacement for safe firearm handling and use!

Taking the Shot

- All responsible stalkers should be capable of properly identifying their quarry and only selecting those animals for culling that comply with the requirements of the annual cull programme.
- When culling female deer, Coillte require all stalkers to cull all accompanying juvenile animals **BEFORE** adult females to avoid the orphaning of dependant calves / fawns.
- Before taking a shot, all stalkers must ensure that the shot to be fired is in a safe direction, with a solid backstop behind the target, which is clearly visible. Thicket trees and scrub must never be considered as adequate to stop a bullet, nor, should it be assumed that these areas are unoccupied.
- A clear, uninterrupted view of the target animal should be obtained, ensuring that there are no obstacles such as twigs, grass or wire fencing in front of the target which may deflect the shot, or other deer behind the target animal, which may be injured by the exiting bullet.
- The location of the target animal and its proximity to nearby land features should be carefully noted before the shot is taken.
- No shot should ever be taken at a deer unless the stalker is 100% satisfied that they are capable of killing it cleanly and humanly. Long distance shots or other “trick” shots should be confined to the target range and never be attempted on live quarry. **If there is any doubt, the shot must not be taken!**
- To minimise the risk of wounding the animal, Coillte highly recommend the stalker to shoot a standing broadside animal, through the heart and lungs. A deer should never be shot in the head or while it is moving, unless taken as a follow-up shot on a wounded animal.

After the Shot

- All stalkers should be capable of determining the appropriate follow-up action by observing the reaction of the deer to the shot. In the event that a follow-up shot is required, the rifle should be immediately re-loaded.
- Particular care should be taken if the animal drops instantly on the spot as a reaction to a “chest shot” through the heart and lungs.
- All shot animals should be approached cautiously, if necessary they should be dispatched immediately and humanely with a follow up shot if it is safe to do so.
- If a shot deer is lost from the stalkers view following the shot, a period of at least 10 minutes should be left before following up. The point where that animal was standing when the shot was fired should be carefully examined for sign of hair, bone and blood, which will indicate where the animal was hit.
- It should always be assumed that the animal is hit as a result of the shot, and every effort should be made to recover it.
- All stalkers are required to have immediate access to a dog which is trained and competent**

in tracking wounded / lost deer, to assist in the rapid location and if necessary, the humane dispatch of any wounded deer.

Carcass handling and inspection

- All stalkers should be familiar with all relevant game meat regulations and ensure all deer carcasses destined for human consumption are handled in accordance with them.
 - Every stalker must be capable of eviscerating (gralloching) and undertaking a field inspection of a deer carcass. Any abnormalities or other sign indicating that the animal may have contracted a notifiable disease must be reported immediately to the landowner and other relevant authorities.
 - All responsible stalkers should carefully record detailed information relating to each animal culled. Such information would include: - Date, location shot, species, sex, age, body weight, body condition, reproductive status, trophy quality, diseases/parasites, etc. Such information should be available to the landowner.
 - All stalkers should have and use appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for the handling and transportation of deer carcasses.
 - No stalker should display any carcass in a manner that may cause offence to other forest users. All stalkers must ensure that all viscera, and other body parts removed from the carcass are disposed of properly in accordance with all relevant regulations and legislation.
 - All deer carcasses intended for sale, must only be sold through a licensed and approved wild game processing facility.
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