

4.4 Land Management Plan Brief

Background Information

The East Sutherland Land Management Plan area is situated in Sutherland, between the towns of Dornoch and Bonar Bridge and the village of Rogart. The plan area extends to over 3075 ha of largely mixed coniferous forests. The forests are predominantly productive with recreation also being a management priority. Landscape is an important issue, given the forests' close proximity to the main A9 tourist route north (Skelbo, Balvraid, Harriets). Rogart Forest is a main landscape feature viewed from Rogart village and is highly visible for the motorists using the A839 public road to Lairg. Achormlarie is quite remote, visible from a minor Bonar Bridge to The Mound (on A9) public road.

Arguably the most important function that the woodlands perform is to provide refuge for designated habitats and species of significance for biodiversity. Achormlarie lies entirely within the Strath Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moors Special Protection Area (SPA) and Site of Significant Scientific Interest (SSSI) for hen harrier, and borders with River Evelix Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for fresh water pearl mussel with watercourses on the southern slopes of the block feeding into the river. Rogart borders with the Strath Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moors SPA & SSSI to the north and the watercourse running from the block are tributaries to River Fleet. Many European Protected Species are recorded locally.

Statement of Intent

The plan area's primary role will be to contribute toward biodiversity targets with conservation of important species and sites, and restoration of riparian woodland as main aims. Recreation, community involvement and maintaining a productive timber resource are also of high importance. In order to maintain the productive capacity of the forest in the long term, the soils will be assessed for suitability to sustain timber production considering predicted changes in the local climate, and restock species will be chosen accordingly. Areas affected by Dothistroma Needle Blight will be closely monitored.

We will continue to work with our stakeholders to identify opportunities to improve conditions for black grouse, juniper, hen harrier and fresh water pearl mussel specifically.

Brief & Objectives

This Land Management Plan is being revised in line with the Scottish Forestry Strategy (SFS) and its seven key themes:

- Climate change
- Timber
- Business development
- Community development
- Access and health
- Environmental quality
- Biodiversity

Seven key themes of SSF formed the basis of Forestry Commission Scotland's Strategic Direction document with its Six National Key Commitments. On the district level, the North Highland Forest District Strategic Plan (2014 – 2017) recognises Six National Key Commitments as significant in relation to the LMP area. These are:

- Healthy; achieving good environmental and silvicultural condition in a changing climate
- Productive; providing sustainable economic benefits from the land
- Treasured; as a multi-purpose resource that sustains livelihoods, improves quality of life and offers involvement and enjoyment
- Accessible; local woodlands and national treasures that are well promoted, welcoming and open for all
- Cared for; working with nature and respecting landscapes, natural and cultural heritage
- Good value; exemplary, effective and efficient delivery of public benefits

It is accepted that each individual forest area within North Highland can only contribute to a limited number of strategic targets as high priority areas. The following table describes how North Highland Forest District will contribute to the National key Commitments from the NHFD Strategic Plan. The targets that are considered fundamental to the delivery of the aims of this Land Management Plan – the critical success factors – are highlighted in **green** in the table below. The delivery of these elements will be the primary factors by which the plan's success is judged at mid-term review and full revision (5 & 10 yrs respectively):



Loch Buidhe, seen from Beinn Domhraill, Achormlarie. Photo: A.Baranska, NHFD

North Highland District Strategic Plan (2014 – 2017) Target:	District Specific Action	How This Forest will Contribute and How We Will Monitor the Achievement of This Target:
<p>Key National Commitment- Healthy Achieving good environmental and silvicultural condition in a changing climate High priority objective in all LMP forest blocks.</p>		
<p>We are committed to high quality silviculture and, increasingly, to using alternatives to clearfelling.</p> <p>We are exploring how to best steward the carbon resources locked up in the Estate's trees and soils.</p> <p>We will help the Estate adapt to climate change and become more resilient to pressure.</p> <p>We are committed to dealing with invasive plants and animals that threaten habitats and biodiversity.</p>	<p>We will use best practice in silviculture to identify productive soils and suitable species and manage these areas accordingly, thinning where climate and soils allow.</p> <p>We will identify areas of woodland where low impact silviculture will most benefit biodiversity, landscape and the forest environment, and implement alternatives to clearfell over appropriate timescales.</p> <p>We will adapt our management as information develops on carbon sequestration with particular emphasis on preserving organic soils and to matching the most productive tree species to the best sites</p> <p>We will continue to diversify the age structure and species composition of our forests making use of silvicultural mixtures and disease resistant species to increase resilience to pathogens and climate change.</p> <p>We will continue to annually monitor the condition of our pine trees to assess the ongoing effects of <i>Dothistoma Needle Blight</i>. Severely affected timber will be targeted for early removal.</p> <p>Where possible, we will strive to work with Scotland's Environmental and Rural Services and our neighbours to develop a sustainable landscape-scale approach to deer management, and promote the National Forest Estate as an exemplar of best practice.</p> <p>We will monitor our woodlands for the presence of invasive plants and animals and take appropriate action to reduce them.</p>	<p>We will concentrate productive conifers on appropriate soils, using species best suited to site conditions.</p> <p>Across the LMP area, we will continue to manage ATC coupes according to LISS principles. New areas suitable for this management type identified during the preparation of the plan will be included in the management proposals.</p> <p>LISS will be managed and recorded by the Programme Manager and the Planning Manager using existing FCS LISS reporting systems.</p> <p>On deep peats, where it is ecologically appropriate and achievable, we will restore native woodland/bog woodland/scrub.</p> <p>We will protect mature stands with unique values or significance as Natural Reserves and Long Term Retentions.</p> <p>We will match the restock species to the site condition.</p> <p>We will monitor the DNB affected stand annually and, if necessary, we will fell badly affected areas early, maximising timber recovery.</p> <p>We will ensure that the LMP area has 100% coverage by Deer Management Plan and will work with neighbouring landowners to identify opportunities to consolidate deer fencing at a landscape scale.</p> <p>We will work with neighbours to identify collaborative control opportunities.</p> <p>Deer management will be monitored and reported on using existing FCS deer management protocols.</p> <p>We will continue to eradicate rhododendron and western hemlock.</p> <p>Monitored by the LMP Forester at mid term review and work plan stages against LMP prescriptions.</p>

<p>Key National Commitment - Productive</p>		
<p>Providing sustainable economic benefits from the land. High priority objective in all LMP forest blocks.</p>		
<p>We aim to increase the contribution of the National Forest Estate to the economy of Scotland and its regions, and recognise the potential of the Estate to assist transition to low carbon economy.</p> <p>We aim to provide at least three million cubic metres of softwood timber every year on a sustainable basis.</p> <p>We will use our work programmes to promote the development of the forestry and land management sectors.</p>	<p>We will review our open land holding and continue to survey the habitats. Where appropriate, we will seek to maximise income from forestry activities, agricultural leases and renewable energy developments.</p> <p>We will produce a forecast of timber production and match those predictions (currently 222,000 cubic meters per year) to subsequent marketing plans. We will work to increase the current annual thinning volume (26,000 cubic metres), and ensure that all suitable areas are thinned.</p> <p>We will remain committed to softwood timber production, and apply best silicultural practice to improve the quality and yields of our commercial conifer timber.</p> <p>We will develop the National Forest Estate in North Highland Forest District into a sustainable resource that can contribute to the viability of the local economy through timber and non-timber productivity. We will strive to further develop the local forestry contractor base in North Highland District to facilitate the delivery of rising restock programmes and promote sustainable local employment.</p>	<p>The production forecast for the FD will be produced to accommodate the demands of managing forest health fellings and may fluctuate within the plan period. We will undertake the felling as per the volumes detailed in Appendix 8 – Coupe Summary.</p> <p>The forecast will be monitored and managed by the FD Planning Manager and Programme Manager.</p>
<p>Key National Commitment - Treasured</p>		
<p>...as a multi-purpose resource that sustains livelihoods, improves quality of life, and offers involvement and enjoyment. High priority objective in Dornoch Blocks and Rogart, low priority in Achormlarie.</p>		
<p>We want to encourage local people to get involved in using and managing local Estate woodlands, so we will actively engage with local communities and be open to work in partnership.</p>	<p>We will continue to support communities that are currently involved in the management of their local forests (Dornoch, Embo, Rogart) and will encourage and support any new approaches.</p>	<p>We will contact the Community Councils who represent this plan area to update them on local and national forestry issues where they have requested this input. CC Contact will be recorded by the LMP Forester and reported on at MTR and full revision.</p>

<p>We will continue to use the Estate as a place for volunteering and gaining employment skills.</p> <p>We are committed to creating more uniquely special places across the Estate and to delivering benefits to an increasingly diverse range of Scotland's people.</p>	<p>We will facilitate, through the National Forest Land Scheme (NFLS), opportunities for community ownership, the development of woodland crofts and the provision of sites for affordable housing.</p> <p>We will continue to work with local schools to deliver Rural Skills SVQ units and work experience placements.</p> <p>We will continue to improve key visitor zones around high priority recreation sites and along major tourist routes; thereby adding to and enhancing the visitor experience.</p>	<p>Embo community is currently negotiating the possibility of owning part of the Fourpenny plantation under NFLS. Dornoch community has a keen interest in management of woodlands around Dornoch.</p> <p>Rogart Community is in a process of developing an agreement with the District CRT Team to maintain and promote access to the paths constructed during the lifespan of the previous plan.</p> <p>Skelbo will have its recreational master plan developed in spring 2015. A wide public consultation will take place to ensure that all the stakeholders have a chance to express their concerns and aspirations.</p> <p>Rogart Community is increasingly more involved in the path management in Rogart.</p> <p>A9 corridor (Skelbo/Balvraid) will be managed to improve road safety and visual appearance of the forest edges.</p> <p>This will be monitored and reported on by the CRT Manager using existing CRT systems.</p>
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<p>Key National Commitment – Accessible</p>		
<p>...local woodlands and national treasures that are well promoted, welcoming and open for all. High priority in Dornoch Blocks and Rogart, low priority in Achormlarie.</p>		
<p>We will continue to invest available resources into high quality facilities that encourage and help visitors experience and enjoy the outdoor environment.</p> <p>We will continue to encourage use of the Estate for health benefits and outdoor learning.</p> <p>Through our Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) programme, we aim to provide more opportunities for more of Scotland’s people to enjoy high quality countryside, and find health, education, skills and community involvement benefits.</p>	<p>We will continue to review our recreation facility provision, monitoring use and concentrating resources where they most benefit visitors and local communities.</p> <p>We will continue to support the work of North Highland FEI Cluster, Highland Council Ranger Service, TCV Green Gym and local schools to deliver education and physical activity programmes on the National Forest Estate.</p> <p>We will continue to develop facilities near larger centres of population in (...), Sutherland, (...) and seek internal and external partners to deliver social opportunity programmes.</p>	<p>Ongoing maintenance of visitor facilities in Skelbo and Camore. District’s CRT Team will develop a detailed ‘master plan’ (spring 2015) to identify any upgrades needed.</p> <p>This will be monitored and reported on by the CRT Manager using existing CRT systems.</p>
<p>Key National Commitment – Cared for</p>		
<p>...working with nature and respecting landscape, natural and cultural heritage. High priority in Achormlarie, medium priority in Dornoch Blocks and Rogart.</p>		
<p>We aim to increase broadleaf tree cover from current 8% of woodland cover to around 20%.</p> <p>We are committed to maintaining the best open habitats in good ecological condition.</p>	<p>We will create riparian woodland areas to provide a permanent network of native broadleaf woodland, contributing to the wider habitat network and buffering important aquatic habitats</p> <p>We will conserve and enhance the significant areas of open habitat on the National Forest Estate, contributing to species and habitat diversity.</p> <p>We will continue to lead the development of best practice in the establishment of transitional habitats – bog and tree line woodland – by contributing to research and implementing</p>	<p>Riparian zones will be restocked with native broadleaves to create riparian woodland This work will be monitored by the Environment Manager under existing native woodland and open habitat reporting mechanisms.</p> <p>The Environment Manager will monitor the management of open habitats using existing FCS protocols and with reference to the FCS Open Habitats Ecologist.</p>

<p>We will identify particularly vulnerable species for which the National Forest Estate is important and take specific conservation action.</p> <p>We will safeguard archaeological sites through our planning and management, and recognise special places and features with local cultural meaning.</p>	<p>appropriate Land Management Plans. We will ensure that all our Land Management Plans take into consideration the requirements of the Water Framework Directive.</p> <p>We will work towards dedicating 5% of our native woodland and 1% of our planted productive woodland to natural reserve, allowing natural processes to create a richly diverse woodland habitat. <i>We will continue to develop significant areas of high quality open and woodland habitat that will benefit all species, including specific work to protect key species and enhance pinewood, (...) and peatland habitats.</i></p> <p>We will review our significant holding of archaeology during land management planning reviews, and create proposals that enhance high priority sites and develop viewing opportunities, thus building on our work with community-based interest groups. We will continue to survey the National Forest Estate to identify and protect significant new heritage sites.</p>	<p>Forest structure change will be monitored and recorded in the LMP reviews by the LMP Forester and the Environment Manager will undertake animal and habitat species surveys using existing Environment protocols.</p> <p>We will maintain full coverage of scheduled monument planning across the LMP area in consultation with Historic Scotland and the FCS Archaeologist.</p> <p>We will record all new discoveries on the GIS Heritage manager tool and inform the necessary stakeholders of location, asking the FCS Archaeologist to comment on significance and recommend the appropriate management.</p> <p>The Environment Manager will manage archaeology using existing heritage systems and protocols.</p>
<p>Key National Commitment – Good value ...exemplary, effective and efficient delivery of public benefits. Medium priority in Dornoch Blocks, Achormlarie and Rogart.</p>		
<p>We will make progressive reductions in the emissions from our Estate management activities.</p>	<p>We will engage fully with the FC Business Sustainability Programme, and seek to conduct our operations in the most environmentally sensitive ways.</p>	