

Appendix VI – Land Management Plan Brief

Background Information

The Easter Ross Land Management Plan area is situated in Ross-shire, between the town of Tain and the B9176 Struie public road running from Skiach on the Cromarty Firth to Fearn on the Kyle of Sutherland. The plan area extends to over 7307 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 forest's close proximity to the main A9 tourist route to Caithness and the long perspective views from the Black Isle and the eastern coast of Sutherland. The forest is also prominent in the landscape when viewed from Tain. Arguably the most important function that the woodlands perform is to provide refuge for designated habitats and species of significance for biodiversity. Primary amongst these are red squirrel and capercaillie. Operations within the forests have high potential to impact on water quality and therefore downstream designated sites and water abstraction points. There are significant PAWS areas, although species diversity is below optimum. 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, full restoration of PAWS, expansion of native woodland and restoration of riparian woodland whilst maintaining a productive timber resource. 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 prematurely felled to protect forest health and maximise the amount of recoverable timber. At the time of this plan revision scots pine stands at Strathrory, in the west of the plan area, are among the worst affected by DNB in the forest district.

We will continue to work with our stakeholders to identify opportunities to improve conditions for capercaillie, red squirrel, black grouse, juniper, pearl bordered fritillary, salmon and sea trout specifically.

Brief & Objectives

This Land Management Plan is being revised in line with the Scottish Forestry Strategy's seven key themes. Previous plans have been revised with particular reference to those themes which are identified by the North Highland Forest District's Strategic Plan as significant in relation to the plan area, however the suite of Forest District Strategic Plans nationally have expired and new Forest District Strategic Plans are currently being drafted that align with Forestry Commission Scotland's Strategic Directions document. The National Aspirations are described as follows:

- 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 Aspirations listed above, with specific reference to the appropriate outgoing Forest District Strategic Plan targets, but listed alongside the appropriate key commitments from the new draft 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 red 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):

North Highland Forest District Strategic Plan Target from outgoing plan agreed by FD Stakeholders:	Corresponding Target from National Strategic Directions and draft North Highland Forest District Strategic Plan for 2013 - 2016:	How This Forest Area Will Contribute and How We Will Monitor the Achievement of This Target:
<p>Key Theme One – Climate Change Adapting to Climate Change</p>		
<p><i>(1.06) By using of the Ecological Site Classification system (ESC) we will make increased use of resilient species (e.g. Scots pine, birch, sycamore, Sitka spruce) to provide insurance for future growth.</i></p>	<p>Healthy; 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>Healthy; 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>Healthy; 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>The Plan area has been seriously affected by DNB infection and felling in the western forests continues to be driven by disease management. Some soils are of poor fertility and may not support further tree crops.</p> <p>We will continue to diversify species and age by adopting LISS, increasing the resilience and resistance of the forest to disease and climate change threats. We will also ensure that restocking and new planting adds to species diversity.</p> <p>We will continue to contribute towards the development of disease and organic soils research and management strategies, ensuring that we comply with best practice as new guidance is published.</p> <p>Monitored by the LMP Forester (increased species diversity appropriate to site and complying with prescriptions in this plan) at mid term review and work plan stages.</p>
<p><i>(1.08) We will identify opportunities in existing forests and potential acquisitions to improve and expand habitat networks</i></p>	<p>Healthy; We will be proactive in managing our organic soil resource, working towards restoration of active peat bogs and developing high quality transitional habitats that protect and enhance the forest margins</p> <p>Cared For; We will create significant 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 restore mire habitats at Strathrory and protect existing blanket bog at Cnoc an t-Sabhail and Strathrory new planting sites.</p> <p>We will increase the area of riparian woodland throughout the plan site, by gradual conversion to native broadleaf woodland and we will ensure all restock sites adhere to a 30m buffer (minimum) from each bank. We propose to establish 19 Ha of new riparian woodland at Strathrory and to continue our work in partnership with Cromarty Fishery Board to expand riparian tree planting along burn-sides currently holding conifer regeneration.</p> <p>This work will establish native woodland corridors that cover the site and the aspiration is that these will eventually form a network of Natural Reserve that link throughout the plan area and connect to adjacent privately owned woodland.</p> <p>This work will be monitored by the Environment Manager under existing native woodland and open habitat reporting mechanisms.</p>

Flood and catchment management		
<i>(1.09) We will comply with Forest and Water Guidelines in a competent and effective manner.</i>	Cared For; We will create significant riparian woodland areas to provide a permanent network of native broadleaf woodland, contributing to the wider habitat network and buffering important aquatic habitats	See target 1.08
Key Theme Two – Timber		
Timber Supply		
<i>(2.01) We will produce a forecast of timber production and match those predictions (currently 333m3/yr) to subsequent marketing plans. We will produce a forecast of timber production and match those predictions (currently 222m3/yr) to subsequent marketing plans.</i>	Productive; We will produce a forecast of timber production and match those predictions (currently 222m3/yr) to subsequent marketing plans	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 . The forecast will be monitored and managed by the FD Planning Manager and Programme Manager.
Timber Quality		
<i>(2.04) We will choose species of correct origins (including improved stock) to best match our sites and will follow sound silvicultural practice to provide quality growing stock at the correct density.</i>	Healthy; 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. Healthy: 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 Healthy; 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	See target 1.06
<i>(2.05) We will work to increase the current annual thinning volume (26km3) and ensure all suitable areas are thinned.</i>	Productive; We will work to increase the current annual thinning volume (26km3) ensuring that all suitable areas are thinned.	The production volumes expected from LISS and other thinning is detailed in Appendix 8 – Coupe Summary . The Programme Manager will review the annual programme using existing reporting systems and the LMP Forester will review progress against plan targets at years 5 & 10 (mid term and full revision).
<i>(2.06) We will continue to use self- thinning, nutritional species mixtures on sites with low fertility and on sites where thinning will result in crop instability.</i>	Healthy; 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.	We have nominated areas as no-thin Productive Biomass Forestry in Map 6 – Future Habitats . We do not propose to thin in these areas due to unsuitable climate and soils conditions; however it is appropriate to propose crops of lower quality wood fibre, where stocking densities and management inputs may be lower. Delivery of these coupes will be monitored by LMP Forester at years 5 and 10.

<p><i>(2.08) We will no longer plant sites with very low nutritional status with commercial species, but will allow them to revert to either open land or native woodland habitat.</i></p>	<p>Healthy: 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>Healthy; We will be proactive in managing our organic soil resource, working towards restoration of active peat bogs and developing high quality transitional habitats that protect and enhance the forest margins</p>	<p>See target 1.08</p>
<p>Key Theme Three – Business Development</p>		
<p>Tourism</p>		
<p><i>(3.07) We will review the quality and location of existing recreation facilities to help in making future decisions on how best to invest limited resources to achieve maximum benefit.</i></p>	<p>Accessible; We will concentrate our all-ability facility provision at Aldie Burn near Tain, Newtonhill Croft, Wick and Ferrywood, Lairg, developing the sites with advice from the Fieldfare Trust</p>	<p>We will construct new car park facilities and upgrade the forest trails at Aldie Burn to Fieldfare Trust specification during the first five years of this plan.</p> <p>Delivery of this target will be monitored by the LMP Forester at mid term review.</p>
<p>Key Theme Four – Community Development</p>		
<p>Community Engagement</p>		
<p><i>(4.03) We will encourage communities that wish to become more involved in the management of, or outputs from, their local forests</i></p>	<p>Treasured; We will continue to support communities that are currently involved in the management of their local forests (Newtonhill, Borgie, Rosehall, Embo) and will encourage and support any new approaches.</p>	<p>We will contact the Community Councils who represent this plan area annually to update them on local and national forestry issues where they have requested this input.</p> <p>CC Contact will be recorded by the LMP Forester and reported on at MTR and full revision.</p>
<p><i>(4.05) We will continue to foster communication with the community to raise awareness of local forest initiatives.</i></p>	<p>Accessible; We will continue to support our partners in delivering education and physical activity programmes on the National Forest Estate through the work of the North Highland FEI Cluster, Highland Council Ranger Service, TCV Green Gym and local schools</p>	<p>We will upgrade our facilities at Aldie Burn and maintain our facilities at Tain Hill and Dounie Hill, providing opportunities for local groups to continue to use the forests.</p> <p>We will continue to build partnerships with the local county ranger service, supporting their delivery of environmental programmes</p> <p>This will be monitored and reported on by the CRT Manager using existing CRT systems.</p>
<p>Learning</p>		
<p><i>(4.09) We will re-establish links with the local education sector at primary school level and by helping to develop vocational initiatives (e.g. rural skills) in secondary schools.</i></p>	<p>Treasured; We will continue to work with local schools to deliver Rural Skills SVQ units and work experience placements</p> <p>Accessible; We will continue to support our partners in delivering education and physical activity programmes on the National Forest Estate through the work of the North Highland FEI Cluster, Highland Council Ranger Service, TCV Green Gym and local schools</p>	<p>We will continue to use the plan area as a site for Rural Skills classes from Alness, Tain and Invergordon.</p> <p>Also see target 4.05</p>

Key Theme Five – Access & Health		
Recreation		
<i>(5.01) We will seek further investment to maintain and enhance current facilities and to increase their usage by local people.</i>	Treasured; We will continue to improve key visitor zones around high priority recreation sites and along major tourist routes thereby adding too and enhancing the visitor experience Accessible; We will continue to review our recreation facility provision, monitoring use and concentrating resources where they most benefit visitors and local communities	See targets 4.05 and 4.09
<i>(5.02) We will continue to facilitate events that will appeal to a wide cross section of the public.</i>	Accessible; We will continue to support our partners in delivering education and physical activity programmes on the National Forest Estate through the work of the North Highland FEI Cluster, Highland Council Ranger Service, TCV Green Gym and local schools	See targets 4.05 and 4.09
Making Access Easier		
<i>(5.04) We will protect public rights of way through woodland and take them into account in forest design and management.</i>	Treasured; We will continue to improve key visitor zones around high priority recreation sites and along major tourist routes thereby adding too and enhancing the visitor experience	We will include the plan area in Visitor Zoning programmes supported by business planning and continue to liaise with the FCS Landscape Architect to ensure best practice landscape design along public routes and in particular within the Dornoch Firth National Scenic Area.
Key Theme Six – Environmental Quality		
Soil, water and air quality		
<i>(6.01) Detailed site planning and consultation with key stakeholder (particularly fisheries boards and SEPA), will be used to identify site and downstream issues for inclusion in subsequent operations.</i>	Cared For; We will create significant riparian woodland areas to provide a permanent network of native broadleaf woodland, contributing to the wider habitat network and buffering important aquatic habitats	See targets 1.08 and 1.09
<i>(6.02) We will follow strictly Forestry Commission Scotland Forests and Water Guidelines in all operations</i>	Cared For; We will create significant riparian woodland areas to provide a permanent network of native broadleaf woodland, contributing to the wider habitat network and buffering important aquatic habitats	See targets 1.08 and 1.09
<i>(6.03) We will continue to work with SEPA and SNH on delivery of the EU Water Framework Directive and the protection of the Special Areas of Conservation on major rivers and tributaries.</i>	Cared For; We will create significant riparian woodland areas to provide a permanent network of native broadleaf woodland, contributing to the wider habitat network and buffering important aquatic habitats	See targets 1.08 and 1.09
<i>(6.05) We will take action to reduce sedimentation, including utilising higher quality road stone.</i>	Cared For; We will create significant riparian woodland areas to provide a permanent network of native broadleaf woodland, contributing to the wider habitat network and buffering important aquatic habitats	See targets 1.08 and 1.09 – the establishment of ‘buffer zones’ around all significant watercourses will assist in filtering run off. FCE will adopt the highest operational standards throughout all operations adhering to CAR and WFD requirements. – monitored by FCE using contract diaries and existing management systems.

Landscape		
<i>(6.06) We will continue to include landscape as a major consideration in long-term forest planning and gradually resolve issues such as hard edges and unnatural geometric boundaries.</i>	Healthy; Through our land management planning we will identify areas of woodland where low impact silviculture will most benefit biodiversity, landscape and the forest environment, implementing alternative systems to clearfell over appropriate timescales. (N)	See target 5.04 This plan proposes to expand the area currently managed under LISS and soils and climate across the site are generally suitable for this. We will continue the long term objective of conversion to LISS by undertaking further group selection fellings at Lamington and by thinning suitable crops to work towards a stand structure that will encourage regeneration potential. LISS will be managed and recorded by the Programme Manager and the Planning Manager using existing FCS LISS reporting systems.
<i>(6.08) We will continue to increase the use of low impact silvicultural systems in areas where crops, sites and circumstances permit</i>	Healthy; Through our land management planning we will identify areas of woodland where low impact silviculture will most benefit biodiversity, landscape and the forest environment, implementing alternative systems to clearfell over appropriate timescales. (N)	See target 6.06
<i>(6.09) We will continue to improve the aesthetic value of the woodlands along major tourist routes to increase visitor enjoyment</i>	Accessible; We will continue to review our recreation facility provision, monitoring use and concentrating resources where they most benefit visitors and local communities	See target 5.04
Cultural Heritage		
<i>(6.11) We will capture the location of all known and any newly discovered unscheduled monuments in our Geographic Information System. We will address their protection through forest design plans and our site operational plans.</i>	Cared For; We will review our significant holding of archaeology during land management planning reviews, creating proposals that enhance high priority sites and develop viewing opportunities, building on our work with community based interest groups. Cared For; We will continue to survey the National Forest Estate to identify and protect significant new heritage sites	We will maintain full coverage of scheduled monument planning across the LMP area in consultation with Historic Scotland and the FCS Archaeologist. 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. The Environment Manager will manage archaeology using existing heritage systems and protocols.
<i>(6.13) We will promote the profile and awareness of cultural heritage during stakeholder engagements, school visits and forest design plan consultations and encourage active involvement in heritage projects by communities and volunteers.</i>	Cared For; We will review our significant holding of archaeology during land management planning reviews, creating proposals that enhance high priority sites and develop viewing opportunities, building on our work with community based interest groups. Cared For; We will continue to survey the National Forest Estate to identify and protect significant new heritage sites	See target 6.11, 4.05 and 4.09

Key Theme Seven – Biodiversity		
Species and habitats		
<i>(7.02) The future forest structure and management practices will continue to be strongly influenced by the need to enhance the prospect for our priority species</i>	<p>Treasured; We will encourage, facilitate and implement development of research in the areas of peat land conservation, woodland grouse management, transitional woodland habitat restoration and soft ground working.</p> <p>Cared For; 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, montane and peat land habitats.(N). Priorities during the plan period will include further development of the Easter Ross Red squirrel stronghold aimed at enhancing the habitat and increasing numbers.</p>	<p>We acknowledge the importance that appropriate forest management will have on all European Protected Species present across the plan area, but will ensure that future forest structure (species and age diversity) specifically benefits capercaillie and red squirrel.</p> <p>We will develop 40 Ha of new native woodland at Cnoc an t-Sabhail to create a natural treeline that will benefit woodland grouse species.</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>
<i>(7.05) Progress will continue in restoring PAWS sites, normally by thinning to gradually reduce the non-native species. The current level of restoration is 14% with an eventual target of 95% (986ha) being either enhanced or fully restored.</i>	<p>Cared For; We will continue to monitor all PAWS across the National Forest Estate in North Highland FD and where appropriate will, through our land management plans, propose restoration or enhancement to productive woodland comprising largely of native tree species</p> <p>Cared For; We will create significant 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 ensure that the PAWS within the plan area are monitored and that baseline surveys are undertaken to inform future management strategies.</p> <p>Where PAWS exists within this plan area we commit to a programme of full restoration through thinning.</p> <p>The Environment Manager will monitor PAWS management using existing FCS PAWS protocols.</p>
<i>(7.06) We will continue to use the national forest estate as an exemplar of best practice in deer management.</i>	<p>Healthy; We will strive to work with SEARS partners and our neighbours to develop a sustainable approach to deer management, where possible, promoting the national forest estate as exemplar of best practice.</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>
Landscape and ecosystems		
<i>(7.08) We will continue to restructure our large, even-aged, single species plantations through the forest design plan process. Improving species, age and habitat diversity will remain a priority.</i>	<p>Healthy; 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>Cared For; We will create significant riparian woodland areas</p>	<p>See targets 1.06, 1.08, 6.06, 6.08 and 7.02</p>

	<p>to provide a permanent network of native broadleaf woodland, contributing to the wider habitat network and buffering important aquatic habitats</p> <p>Cared For; 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 appropriate land management plans.</p>	
<p><i>(7.09) We will seek to identify areas within our existing landholding that, if planted, could provide vital links in the local habitat network. We will also seek to acquire land (through either purchase or excambion) that is identified as being important in creating or enhancing habitat networks</i></p>	<p>Cared For; We will create significant 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>Cared For; 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 appropriate land management plans.</p>	<p>We will undertake new planting of 19 Ha at Strathrory, ensuring that HAP habitats are protected and that European Protected Species are not adversely affected.</p> <p>We will continue to undertake supplementary planting in riparian areas to increase species diversity and forest structure, with particular emphasis on increasing the area of aspen across the LMP area.</p> <p>New planting will be monitored by the LMP Forester at MTR and full plan revision.</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>Increasing awareness and improving knowledge</p>		
<p><i>(7.12) We will promote the profile and awareness of biodiversity requirements during stakeholder engagements, school visits and Forest Design Plan consultations and encourage active involvement in biodiversity projects by communities and volunteers.</i></p>		<p>See targets 4.05 and 4.09</p>