



Aultmore Land Management Plan Review Initial Statutory and Public Consultation

September – October 2024

Key Features

Peatland Restoration: areas of deep peat have been found across Aultmore and will be assessed for peatland restoration by re-wetting.

Plant Health: there are areas of Dothistroma Needle Blight (DNB) infected crops across the block. The severity of the infection varies greatly.

Water Supply: private water supply points and pipelines within the forest. A combination of live and abandoned infrastructure.

Watercourses: several watercourses originate within the forest including the Aultmore Burn, which is a tributary of the River Isla.

Recreation: formal and informal paths through Aultmore, including the Fish Wives Path.

Location and Landscape

The earlier Land Management Plan (LMP) approval expired on 13 January 2024. There are no active schemes or permissions.

The Forest of Aultmore area is situated in the extreme east of Morayshire at NJ447585 and is approximately 7 kilometers (km) south of the port of Buckie and 8 km north of Keith. It lies between the B9016 and B9018. It was originally a peat moorland and was planted between 1961 and 1973. The forest block covers 2,415.2 hectares (ha).

The landform of this area includes broad, gently undulating slopes. These are cut by gently graded valleys and punctuated by distinctive hills such as Knock Hill. Woodlands cover a smaller proportion of the land here compared to the west of Moray and they are less integrated within the farmland. The forest is surrounded by farmland and is visible within the local Morayshire landscape. The elevation runs from about 150 metres to 300 meters at the top of Aultmore.

The forest is found on a ridge of higher ground running east west. The northern aspect of the ridge faces the coast at Buckie. The southern face overlooks Strath Isla, and its associated river. The main drainage systems are represented by narrow steeper sided burns. The gully bisecting the block towards its eastern end is the source of the Burn of Aultmore, which runs down to the River Isla and thence to the Deveron, an important local salmon fishery.

Soils

The Organic soils that underlie about half of the block are made up of Blanket peats. The FCS “Report on a soil survey of Aultmore Forest” completed in 1971 states that “the most important feature of the soil group distribution in Aultmore is the comparatively large percentage of Calluna-dominated blanket peats and peaty phases of soils, at comparatively low elevations”. It goes on to conclude that “the chief current silvicultural problem...is the urgent correction of NP.

[Nitrogen and Phosphate] deficiency in SS planted extensively...in low-ratio mixtures with LP, and sometimes SP, on all soil types...”

The peaty soils in Aultmore will be assessed as to whether they are appropriate for restocking or for re-wetting as peatland restoration.

Woodland Description

Extensive areas of Aultmore were felled in the last plan period due to Dothistroma Needle Blight (DNB) this will lead to a higher percentage of establishment aged crops as restocking is undertaken (Figure 1 and Table 1).

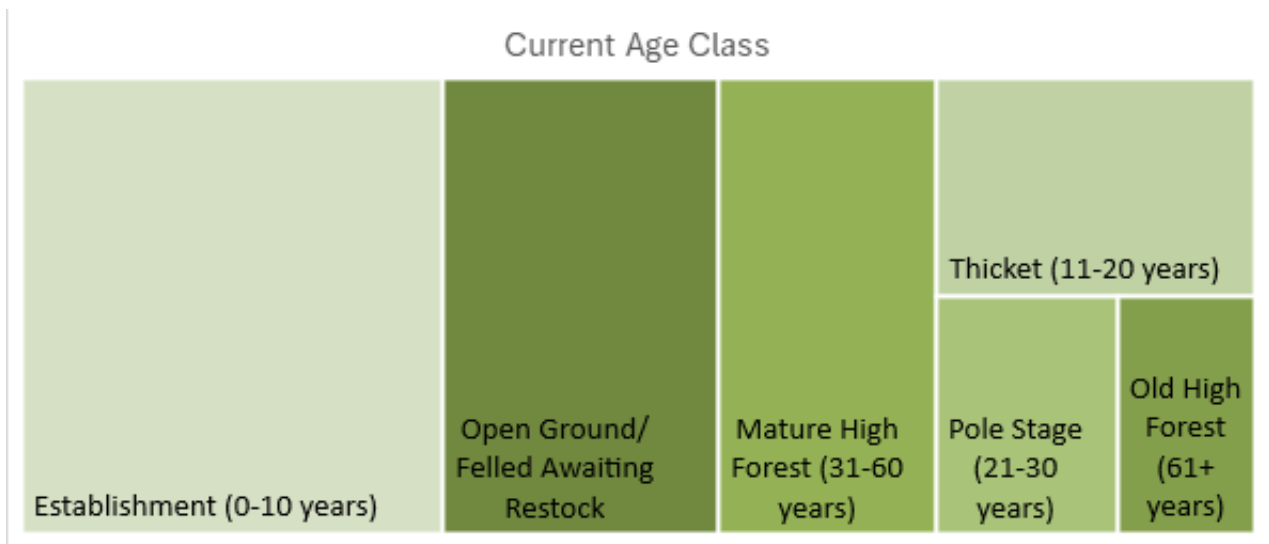


Figure 1: current age class.

Table 1: current age profile.

Age Profile	Area (ha)	Area (%)
Establishment (0-10 years)	826.2	34
Thicket (11-20 years)	297.0	12
Pole Stage (21-30 years)	185.5	8
Mature High Forest (31-60 years)	427.3	18
Old High Forest (61+ years)	140.5	6
Open Ground/Felled Awaiting Restock	538.7	22
Total	2,415.2	100

Sitka Spruce and Lodgepole Pine are the two largest species components of Elchies, currently making up 63% of the forest, with low levels of Native Mixed Broadleaves (1%) (Figure 2 and Table 2). The large area of Open Ground/Felled Awaiting Restock is a legacy of the last 10 years of DNB felling.

The choice of restock will reflect our current understanding of the performance of second rotation conifers on soils that are peaty. This will result in Sitka Spruce and Lodgepole Pine mixes, areas of Native Mixed Broadleaves within the riparian zones, in addition to areas re-wetted as peatland restoration where the peat is deepest (over 50 cm) and cannot grow Sitka Spruce at Yield Class 8 or above.

Figure 2: current species.



Table 2: current species.

Species	Area (Ha)	Area (%)
Serbian Spruce	1.3	0%
Norway Spruce	9.8	0%
Native Mixed Broadleaves	30.4	1%
Scots Pine	148.2	6%
Larch	164.5	7%
Open Ground/Felled Awaiting Restock	538.7	22%
Lodgepole Pine	590.1	24%
Sitka Spruce	932.2	39%
Total	2,415.2	100%

Hydrology

Aultmore is the source of several minor watercourses. Those flowing down the northern face of the ridge join with other tributaries to form the Burns of Tynet, Cairnfield and Buckie. They all form part of the Banff coast catchment area.

The tributaries flowing down the southern face eventually feed into the River Isla, which forms one of the main rivers in the Deveron catchment area. Due to its remote location Aultmore does not pose a major threat to the quality of the surrounding river systems, but its impacts on water quality will still need to be considered when planning operations.

The northeastern corner of the block is situated within a critical load exceedance square with the remainder of the block in the adjacent square. Therefore, this plan will seek to reduce the potential for further acidification of all watercourses leaving this block.

There are three small water bodies within the forest, the most significant at Henshead Moss (NJ 4201 5626), an area of deep peat, historically dammed.

Private Water Supplies and Associated Pipelines

Private water supplies (PWS) are located within the forest. They are a combination of Type A or Type B supply; each being governed by separate legislation. The beneficiaries of a PWS owe a duty of care to themselves to safeguard the PWS through adequate and effective maintenance, repair, and renewal. However, where a registered PWS is on land managed by FLS we share a duty of care to protect the original water source and the supply network (pipes, tanks, lades etc.) to safeguard the quality and quantity of water.

As per [Managing Forest Operations to Protect The Water Environment](#), all PWS will be protected by a 50 m and water pipelines by a 20 m (10 m either side) operational buffer, managed as open with an allowance of 20% native mixed broadleaves. PWS that is either surface fed or shallow (spring fed) will have a catchment identified, machine trafficking and brash heaps will be minimised within the catchment boundary.

Public Access and Recreation

Recreation in Aultmore is low-key and most usage centres on and around the informal footpath and forest road network. Many visits are by residents exercising their dogs, mountain bikers do use the forest and there is evidence of them throughout Elchies. However, numbers are low and the impact manageable. Usage for horses has remained constant. The only formal route through Aultmore, is the [Fishwives Route](#).

Historic Environment

No scheduled sites present within the plan area. There is one site of regional importance, [Tor na Sliasg](#) Cairn, which is protected by a non-operational buffer. There are a wide range of unscheduled sites across the forest, some of which have been known of for some time and others discovered more recently through pre-operation site checks and surveys conducted by a local archaeologist.

Biodiversity

To support the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, FLS are focusing on the following:

Forest and woodland management will have led to **sustainable natural regeneration**; a greater **diversity of woodland species**; **increased woodland cover** with a healthy understorey, **enhanced woodland connectivity**; and improved integration of trees into other land uses.

Ensure that productive forests and woodlands are designed and managed in ways that deliver **increased biodiversity and habitat connectivity** whilst sustaining timber production and carbon sequestration to meet the climate crisis and reduce their vulnerability to climate risks.

The Scottish Biodiversity List is a list of animals, plants, and habitats that Scottish Ministers consider to be of principal importance for biodiversity conservation in Scotland. Biodiversity List species and FLS Key Species are recorded in Aultmore, these include:

- Afforested bog, that shows evidence of previously being active Blanket Bog is present throughout Aultmore.
- Hen Harrier, Merlin, Goshawk, Osprey and Capercaillie sightings.
- Red Squirrel and Pine Martins are recorded throughout the forest, along with records of Badger setts.

Within Aultmore, there is 145.2 ha of Long-established Woodlands of Plantation Origin (LEPO). This is interpreted as plantation from maps of 1750 or 1860 and continuously wooded since. These sites are classed as 'Low Ecological Potential', therefore, we will consider a full range of commercial felling and restocking prescriptions where soils are appropriate.