



Correen Hills Long Term Plan Review

Initial Statutory and Public Consultation

July 2026

Key Features

Timber production will remain the primary focus of management within the Correen Hills forest area. The forest will continue to be managed as a productive commercial woodland, with sustainable harvesting and restocking helping to maintain a reliable supply of timber while supporting long-term forest resilience. Forest restructuring will also be used to address areas affected by windblow and improve future stability.

The forest contains a number of **watercourses**, riparian habitats and areas of **open ground** which contribute to biodiversity and landscape character. These areas will be protected through careful forest design, with opportunities taken to strengthen habitat networks, maintain open habitats and expand native woodland where appropriate.

There are several areas of **Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites** (PAWS) within the forest. These areas will be managed to protect and enhance their ecological value, with opportunities for restoration considered where practical and compatible with wider management objectives.

A key feature of the forest is the network of **steep gullies** and watercourses present in some areas. Some of these areas are becoming increasingly difficult to manage commercially and may be retained under long-term retention or minimum intervention management, providing valuable habitat and structural diversity.

The forest supports a range of **priority species** and habitats, including native woodland, open ground and riparian habitats. Management will focus on maintaining and enhancing these features while ensuring woodland establishment and habitat objectives are supported through effective deer management.

The Gordon Way is the principal recreational route within the forest. Public access will continue to be provided in line with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, with forest operations planned to minimise disruption wherever practicable and maintain safe access along key routes.

The Correen Hills forests form a prominent feature within the **local landscape**, occupying a distinctive upland ridge above the surrounding farmland. Future felling and restocking will be designed to reflect landform, improve forest structure and create a more varied and resilient landscape over time.

The forest contains an extensive network of roads and operational infrastructure, including a strategically important **quarry**. Existing infrastructure will continue to support sustainable forest management, with opportunities considered to improve forest access and secure future material supplies for road maintenance and timber harvesting operations.

Location and Landscape

Correen Hills lies approximately 6 km north of Alford in Aberdeenshire and covers around 1,500 hectares. The forest occupies a prominent upland ridge extending east to west across the Correen Hills, with the Whitehaugh block to the east and Knockespock to the west. The surrounding landscape is predominantly agricultural, with farmland and scattered rural properties bordering much of the forest area.

The forest occupies a varied landscape of rounded hills, steep-sided gullies and watercourses. Elevation ranges from approximately 220 metres to over 440 metres above sea level, creating a range of aspects, exposures and growing conditions. The ridge is generally steeper on its northern slopes, while the southern side transitions more gradually into the surrounding agricultural landscape. Numerous burns cut through the forest, forming distinctive gullies that contribute to the area's character and biodiversity value.

Correen Hills forms a prominent feature in the wider landscape and is visible from many surrounding roads, settlements and high points. Extensive areas of conifer woodland cover much of the ridge, creating a distinctive backdrop to the surrounding countryside. While many views of the forest are distant, localised viewpoints and roads provide more direct views of forest edges and harvesting areas. Forest design will continue to take account of the surrounding landform and visual sensitivities, ensuring that future felling and restocking patterns fit the landscape and improve structural diversity over time.

The forest also provides an important transition between the upland moorland of the higher ground and the agricultural landscapes that surround the lower slopes. Future management will seek to maintain this relationship through careful forest design, retention of open habitats, targeted native woodland expansion and the gradual diversification of forest structure where appropriate.

Soils

The Correen Hills forests are underlain predominantly by acidic upland soils, including podzols and ironpan soils, with smaller areas of brown earths and wetter ground associated with watercourses and open habitats. These soils are generally nutrient-poor and support productive forestry through the use of species that are well suited to local site conditions.

The majority of the forest soils have a poor or very poor nutrient regime and occur across a landscape of exposed ridges, steep slopes and sheltered gullies. Combined with the relatively wet climate of the area, these conditions favour productive conifer species such as Sitka spruce, while also providing opportunities for Scots pine, Norway spruce and a range of native broadleaved species in suitable locations.

Future restocking proposals will continue to be guided by site suitability, ensuring species are matched to soil and climatic conditions. Opportunities will also be taken to increase species diversity where appropriate, particularly within riparian areas, habitat corridors and other locations where environmental benefits can be delivered alongside productive forestry objectives.

Steeper slopes, gullies and wetter soils present localised management constraints which influence both harvesting and restocking design. These areas will continue to be considered carefully during forest operations to protect soils, maintain water quality and ensure long-term forest resilience.

Woodland Description

Age Class

The forest is currently dominated by mature woodland, with over half of the plan area classified as Mature High Forest (31-60 years). Smaller areas of younger woodland are distributed throughout the forest, reflecting previous harvesting and restocking activity. A significant proportion of the forest is currently open ground or awaiting restocking, much of which is associated with recent forest management operations.

This age structure reflects the history of management within Correen Hills and will gradually become more diverse through future harvesting, restocking and forest restructuring. In particular, the progressive harvesting of mature stands and establishment of new woodland will help create a more balanced age structure and improve long-term forest resilience.

Figure 1: current age class coverage.

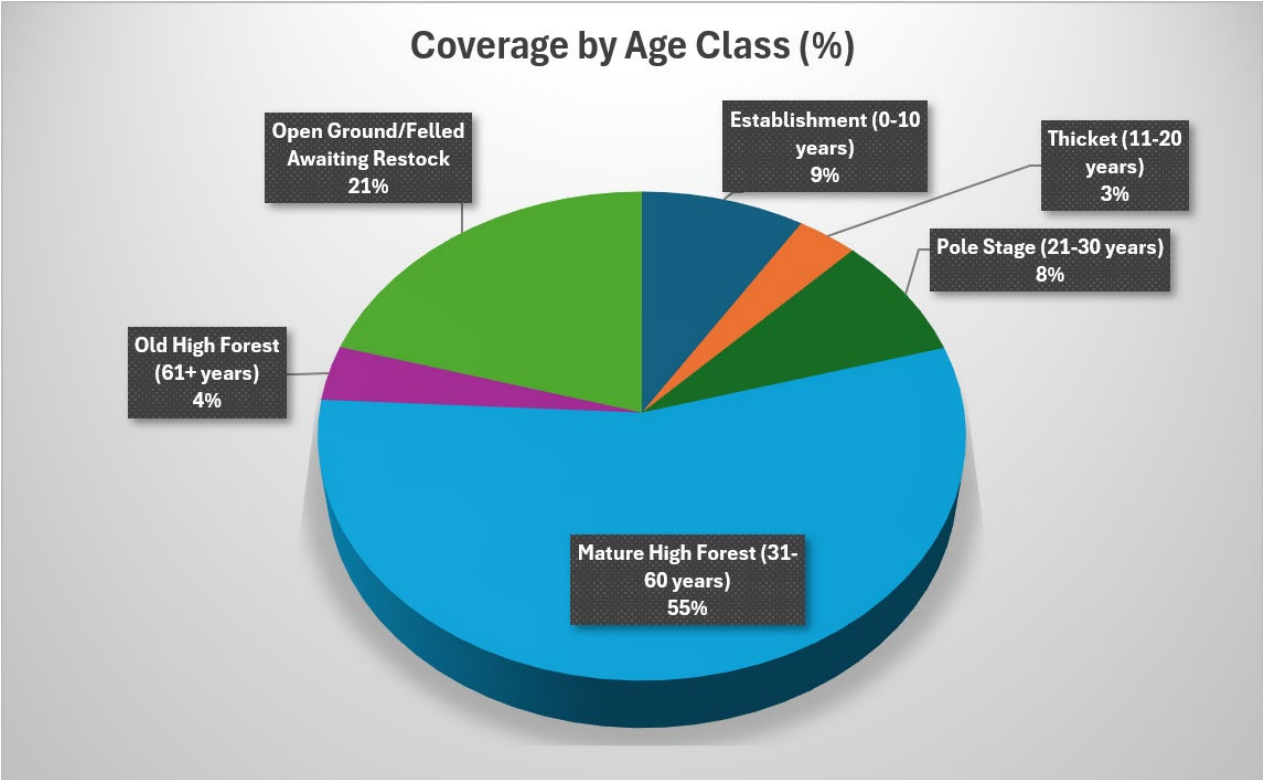


Table 1: current age profile.

Age Profile	Area (ha)	Area (%)
Establishment (0-10 years)	133.5	9.0
Thicket (11-20 years)	49.5	3.3
Pole Stage (21-30 years)	123.2	8.3
Mature High Forest (31-60 years)	822.9	55.3
Old High Forest (61+ years)	54.2	3.6
Open Ground/Felled Awaiting Restock	305.2	20.5
Total	1488.5	100.0%

Species Coverage

Sitka spruce is the dominant species across the Correen Hills forests, accounting for almost 60% of the plan area. Other important conifer species include larch, Scots pine, Lodgepole pine, Norway spruce and Douglas fir. This reflects the forest's historic development as a productive commercial woodland and the suitability of the site for conifer forestry.

Broadleaved woodland currently occupies a relatively small proportion of the forest. Mixed native broadleaves cover approximately 4.1% of the plan area, which is below the level expected under the UK Forestry Standard. Increasing the proportion of broadleaved woodland will therefore be an important objective of the Long Term Plan. Opportunities will be taken to establish additional broadleaved and native woodland in suitable locations, particularly along watercourses, habitat corridors, forest edges and other areas where environmental benefits can be delivered alongside productive forestry objectives.

Future planting proposals will seek to:

- increase the proportion of broadleaved woodland across the forest
- improve habitat connectivity and riparian woodland networks
- increase overall species diversity
- improve resilience to climate change, pests and diseases
- maintain productive conifer species as the principal timber resource

The forest also contains a significant area of open space and land awaiting restocking, much of which is associated with recent harvesting activity. These areas provide opportunities to deliver the species diversification and habitat enhancement objectives identified within the plan while maintaining the forest's role as a sustainable timber resource.

Figure 2: current species.

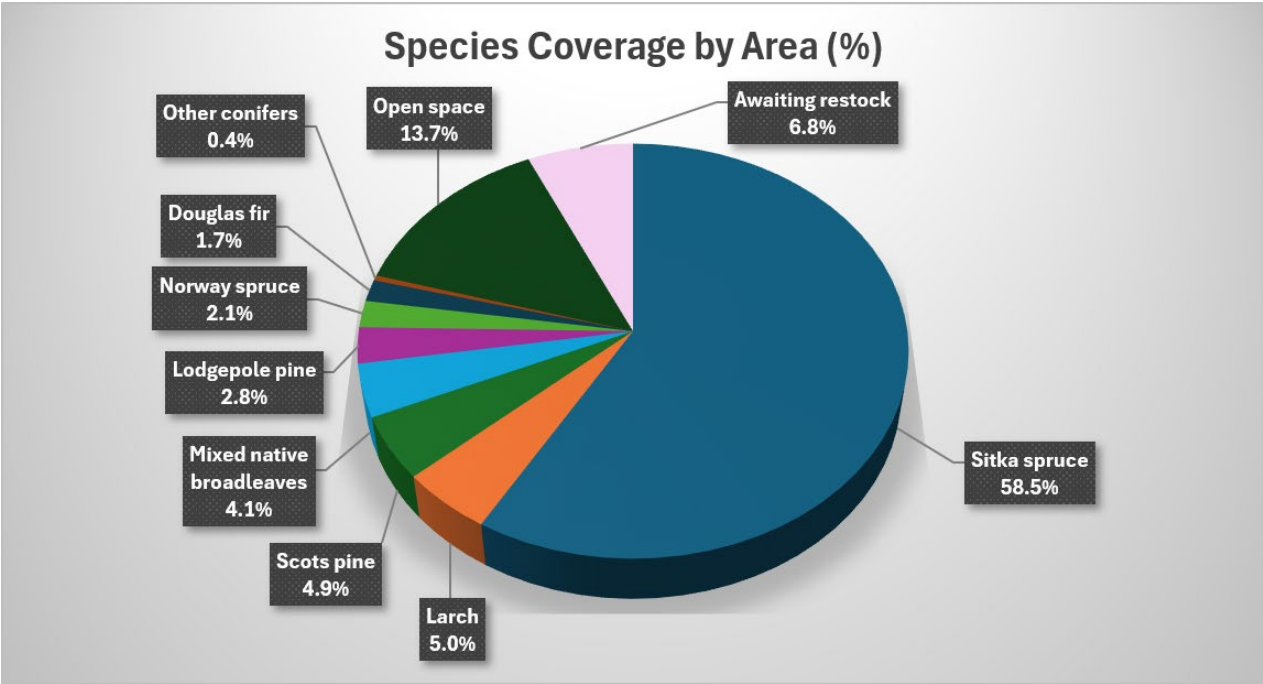


Table 2: current species.

Species	Area (Ha)	Area (%)
Sitka spruce	870.4	58.5
Larch	74.4	5.0
Scots pine	73.2	4.9
Mixed native broadleaves	61.3	4.1
Lodgepole pine	41.7	2.8
Norway spruce	31	2.1
Douglas fir	25.2	1.7
Other conifers	6	0.4
Open space	204	13.7
Awaiting restock	101.3	6.8
Total	1488.5	100.0%

Hydrology

The Correen Hills forests contain a network of burns, streams and associated riparian habitats that drain the upland ridge to the surrounding catchments. Many of these watercourses flow through steep-sided gullies which are important landscape features and provide valuable habitat corridors throughout the forest. Major burns within the forest include the Casaiche Burn, Den of Drumgowon, Clystie Burn, Den Burn and Suie Burn.

These watercourses play an important role in biodiversity, water quality and landscape character. Forest operations will continue to be planned and delivered in accordance with the UK Forestry Standard and Forests and Water Guidelines, ensuring that water quality is protected and natural drainage patterns are maintained. Riparian buffers, appropriate species selection

and careful operational planning will be used to minimise impacts from harvesting and restocking activities.

Several areas of riparian woodland and designed open space are located alongside burns and drainage features. Opportunities will be taken to enhance these areas through native woodland expansion, improved habitat connectivity and the maintenance of open ground where this delivers environmental benefits.

Private Water Supplies and Associated Pipelines

There are a number of private water supplies and associated infrastructure located within and around the Correen Hills forest area. These supplies provide water to neighbouring properties and are an important consideration when planning forest operations.

All known private water supplies, pipelines and associated infrastructure will be identified and mapped where information is available. Forest operations will be planned to avoid impacts on water quantity, water quality and supply infrastructure. Appropriate buffer zones and operational safeguards will be applied in accordance with current guidance and best practice.

Harvesting, restocking, road construction and other management activities will be designed to minimise the risk of sedimentation, compaction or accidental damage to supply networks. Site-specific mitigation measures will be implemented where operations take place close to known water supply catchments or pipelines.

Forestry and Land Scotland will continue to engage with private water supply owners where necessary to ensure supplies are appropriately protected throughout the delivery of the Long Term Plan.

Public Access and Recreation

The Correen Hills forest area is primarily used for informal recreation, with walking, horse riding and nature enjoyment being the main activities undertaken within the forest. The forest has an extensive network of forest roads and tracks which provide opportunities for access across much of the woodland.

The Gordon Way long-distance route is the principal recreational asset within the plan area and passes through the eastern part of the forest before reaching a car park on the Suie Road. The route is well established and will continue to be supported through appropriate forest management and operational planning.

There are currently no plans for significant new recreational infrastructure within the forest. The focus of management will be on maintaining safe and responsible access while ensuring that recreation remains compatible with sustainable forest management. Forest operations will be planned to minimise disruption to users wherever practicable, with temporary diversions or closures implemented where necessary to ensure public safety.

Public access will continue to be provided in accordance with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, and the forest will remain available for a wide range of informal recreational activities. Existing access arrangements and known rights of access will be taken into account during both operational planning and stakeholder consultation.

Given the relatively low level of recreational use compared to some other Forestry and Land Scotland sites, engagement during the plan review will focus primarily on local communities, neighbouring landowners and key stakeholders with an interest in access and land management.

Historic Environment

The Correen Hills forests contain a range of recorded historic environment features, including former farmsteads, boundary features, estate infrastructure and other archaeological remains that reflect the area's long history of land use. While there are currently no Scheduled Monuments within the forest, a number of other heritage features have been identified through historic environment records and previous surveys.

These features contribute to the cultural heritage of the forest and will be protected during forest management operations. Known heritage assets will be identified during operational planning and appropriate measures will be put in place to avoid damage from harvesting, restocking, road construction and other forestry activities.

A review of heritage records is being undertaken as part of the Long Term Plan process to ensure that any additional features are identified and considered within future management proposals. Forestry operations will be planned in accordance with the UK Forestry Standard and relevant guidance relating to the historic environment.

In addition to protecting individual sites, opportunities will be taken to improve the visibility and condition of heritage features where this can be achieved through routine forest management. This will help ensure that the historic environment continues to form an important part of the character and identity of Correen Hills.

Biodiversity

Correen Hills supports a diverse range of woodland, open ground and freshwater habitats that contribute to the ecological value of the wider landscape. The forest contains areas of native woodland, riparian habitat, open heath and Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS), all of which influence future management and forest design.

A key biodiversity objective for the Long Term Plan is to improve habitat connectivity across the forest while maintaining its role as a productive commercial woodland. Opportunities will be taken to expand native and broadleaved woodland in suitable locations, particularly along watercourses, forest edges and habitat corridors. Existing areas of open habitat will be reviewed and managed to maintain or enhance their ecological value where appropriate.

Several areas of PAWS occur within the forest and represent important remnants of historic woodland cover. These areas will be managed to protect and enhance their ecological value, with opportunities for restoration considered through future harvesting and restocking programmes where practical and sustainable.

The steep gullies and riparian corridors that traverse the forest provide valuable habitat networks and support a variety of species. In some locations these areas are increasingly difficult to manage commercially and may be retained under long-term retention or minimum

intervention management, helping to increase structural diversity and create areas of greater ecological continuity.

Effective deer management will continue to play an important role in achieving biodiversity objectives. Managing deer impacts will help ensure successful woodland establishment, support habitat restoration and promote the development of native woodland and broadleaved planting areas.

Future management will seek to balance productive forestry with environmental enhancement, creating a more resilient forest that supports timber production, biodiversity and wider ecosystem benefits.