

Fort Augustus Land Management Plan

- 2024 Plan Revision Brief

Introduction

This brief provides a formative outline for the revision of the Land Management Plan (LMP) for the open land and forests that Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) own and manage within Glen Moriston, around Fort Augustus and along the north-western slopes of Loch Ness (from Fort Augustus via Invermoriston to Bunloit).

The purpose of the Brief is to give stakeholders sufficient indication of the general direction of management envisaged, at the outset of Plan revision, in order that they may feedback comments or suggest alternative objectives and management. These can be given due consideration, alongside feedback and recommendations made by FLS staff and other statutory stakeholders, in the drawing together a new 10-year LMP for this area.

The Brief is accompanied by 6 maps:

Map 1 – Location

Map 2 – Key Issues and Challenges *(with supplementary text label document)*

Maps 3a and 3b – Indicative Felling proposals

Map 4a and 4b – Indicative Future Habitats and Species proposals

This revision process will conclude with the approval of a new LMP to cover 2024 to 2034. The new Plan is required to align with the [Scotland's Forestry Strategy](#) (2019-2029), [Forestry and Land Scotland's Corporate Plan](#) (2022-2025) and ultimately be delivered in accordance with the [United Kingdom Forestry Standard](#) and the [United Kingdom Woodland Assurance Standard](#).

The new LMP will detail felling and restocking proposals for the next ten years. However at the outset of external scoping, **Maps 3a, 3b, 4a and 4b** can only give an indication of how this work would be enacted *if the management proposals given in the current Plan were implemented without further alteration by this ongoing revision process* (i.e. the maps are 'indicative' at this stage).

FLS will also review management of designated and environmentally valuable sites within the LMP area; how we intend to manage for tree health issues, how we control non-native invasive plant species as well as propose new civil engineering work envisaged to allow us to deliver the Plan's forest management objectives.

A record of engagement undertaken with local and statutory stakeholders is maintained throughout the Plan revision process (i.e. postal and email correspondence, site meetings, phone calls etc). A summarised copy of this record will be presented as an appendix to the final published Plan (and preserving individual's anonymity in line with GDPR).

Although the focus of external scoping is on deriving the next ten years’ forest and land management priorities, FLS appreciate this consultation offers the public an opportunity to scrutinise and feedback upon a far wider range of possible issues and concerns relating to this area. FLS therefore endeavour to pass any specific feedback to relevant FLS staff for separate consideration and engagement if it does not specifically pertain to the production of the new LMP.

1. Background

FLS’ Fort Augustus landholdings cover 9,716 ha of which just over half is afforested and the remainder open ground (see Figure 1 below). The forests generally occupy the mid- to lower slopes of ground running continuously from Fort Augustus in the south-west, along Loch Ness-side toward Drumnadrochit in the north-east and also within Glen Moriston - as far west as Dalchriechart. (see Location **Map 1**).

Currently the forests are managed primarily for timber production however there is already a significant and increasing amount of management specifically for environmental conservation. The Plan area supports a number of protected wildlife species and contains a large element of PAWS (Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites) including several fragmented elements of the Achlain, Dundreggan and Achnaconeran old Caledonian pinewood. Occupying ground within the catchments of rivers Moriston and Oich, the forest plays an important role in conserving water quality and influences flow regulation. The forests are also a prominent, often dominant, feature in the local landscape - providing a ‘backdrop’ to Loch Ness, Fort Augustus and Invermoriston landscapes as viewed from main transport corridors, interior and external, remote settlements and from popular external vantage points. There is also high recreational interest in certain areas around Fort Augustus and Invermoriston whilst the nationally-important ‘Great Glen Way’ long distance trail also passes through the Plan area.

The current composition of land use is presented below:-

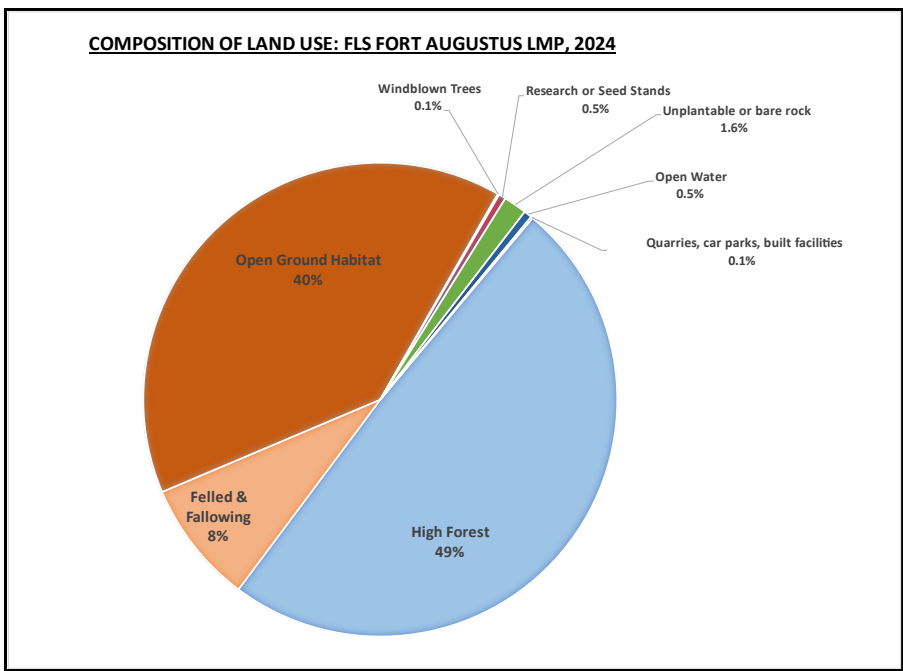


Figure 1: Current land use in FLS’ Fort Augustus LMP area

As depicted, over half (57%) of the land area is either standing High Forest or currently felled ground awaiting trees either by restocking or natural regeneration. The term ‘High Forest’ embraces long-established native woodland as well as both native and non-native coniferous woodland planted over the last one hundred years for timber production.

The composition of tree species across all forest areas (i.e. ‘High Forest’ and ‘Fallow’ areas combined) is shown in the chart below:-

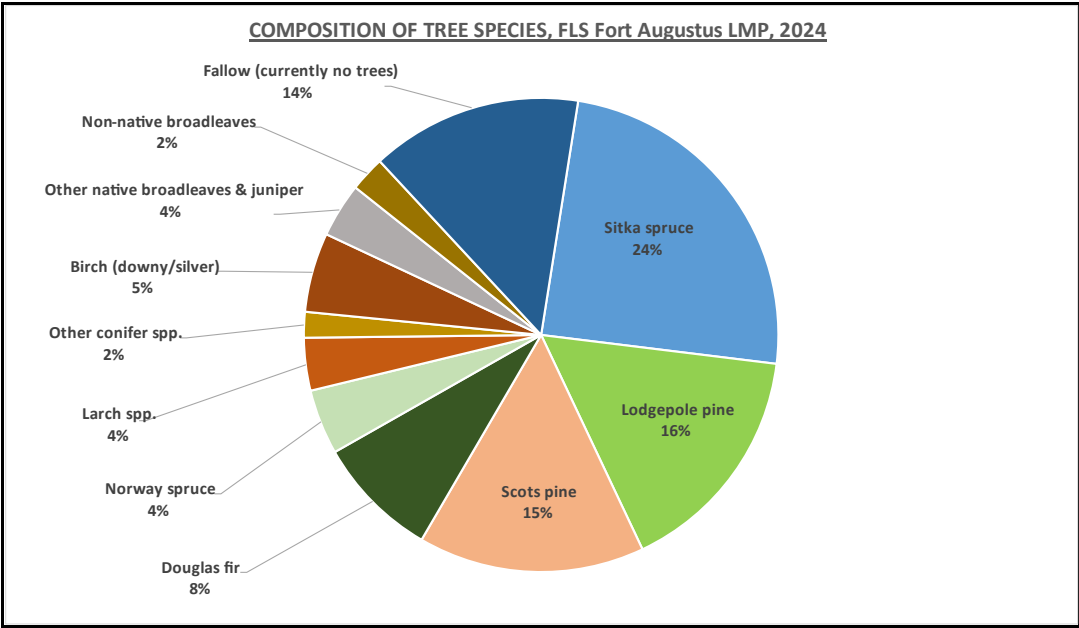


Figure 2: Current tree species composition as a percentage of forested land in FLS’ Fort Augustus LMP area.

Finally Figure 3 illustrates the age distribution of trees in the forest(s). This information gives an indirect indication of the diversity of forest habitat present - as different flora and fauna require specific woodland conditions (age, stature, shade, humidity, longevity etc) to persist and thrive.

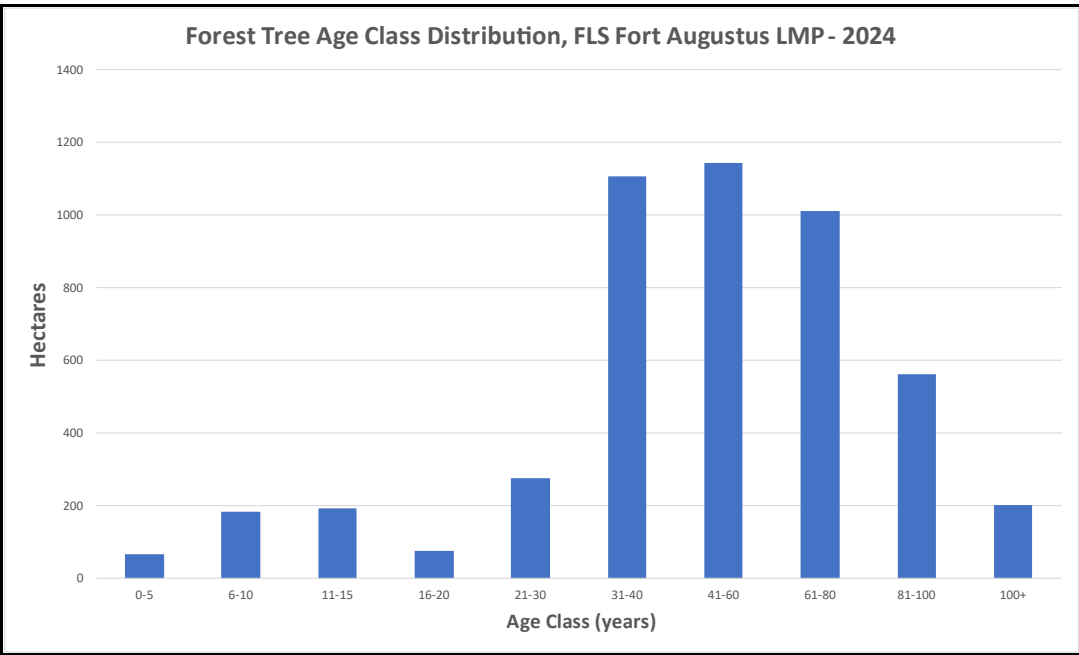


Figure 3: Current Age Class distribution for forested land in FLS’ Fort Augustus LMP area.

As the chart shows, a large proportion of trees are between 30 and 100 years old. This reflects the relatively intensive period of afforestation with timber-producing non-native conifers undertaken by the Forestry Commission between the mid-1920's to the mid-1990's. These productive forests are typically felled at between 40 and 80 years of age (dictated by the tree, or stand of trees', particular growth rate) and indicates the relative maturity of these forests.

Map 2 – Key Issues and Challenges attempts to summarise the most significant factors that have determined the overall direction of management to date and that will undoubtedly continue to influence objectives and management priorities over the next decade and beyond. A brief synopsis of each labelled issue is also described in slightly more detail below.

3. Draft Objectives

The current Land Management Plan can be viewed online on FLS's 'Active Plans' web pages. This Plan has the following **principal management objectives**:

- Restoration of native woodland at a landscape scale over the next 50 years.
- Minimise risk posed to people and A82 trunk road through good design & practice.
- Protect and enhance the water quality of the Ness catchment.
- Promote resilience of the forest to the future challenges of climate change.
- Strengthen ties with local community & enhance landscape of Great Glen & Loch Ness.
- Sustainable timber production within Inchnacardoch and the productive native woodland zones.

Additionally the Plan states its **long term vision** as *“To restore native woodland at a landscape scale, and in the long term, to restore natural processes throughout the native woodland and open habitat from Glen Moriston to Fort Augustus. This will be achieved by working in partnership with Trees for Life and other native woodland owners to deliver a common vision for native woodlands in the wider landscape.”*

At the outset of the present Plan revision, FLS still consider this long term ambition to be appropriate and the objectives derived to achieve this vision still relevant. Several new issues and challenges have materialised since the last Plan revision in 2014. External scoping is likely to identify further factors that require due consideration in preparation of a new Plan.

4. Key Issues and Features

During preliminary internal discussion of the LMP revision, staff involved in the delivery of the last Plan's management contributed a list of key issues they considered of particular significance in defining and implementing future land management. These are shown spatially on **Map 2 – Key Features and Issues** but itemised here for completeness:

- Slope stability/trunk road resilience: Maturing and over-mature conifer plantation on extremely steep, potentially unstable slopes above major A82 trunk road.

- Access/recreation: Forest trails - including long distance route 'Great Glen Way' - as well as threshold car parks, interpretation and picnic sites are of important recreational value to both locals and visitors.
- Heritage: Torr Dhuinn scheduled monument and extensive sections of old military 'Wades' road are located within the LMP area. Additional, scattered pre- & post-medieval ruins/structures can be found within the wider afforested areas.
- Utilities (electricity): Beaully-Denny powerlines pass through the LMP area - as do several current and planned tributary lines - focussed upon the Auchterawe sub-station.
- Utilities (water): FLS ground hosts both public and private water supply infrastructure and catchment(s) - susceptible to potential impacts from inappropriate forest management. Forest and internal roads are on steep slopes with potentially unstable soils – to be considered in forest operational planning (*map label points to Ratagan/Letterfearn flank*);
- Utilities (renewables): four hydro-electric schemes have been established within the last Plan period, and powerlines for neighbouring windfarms, also traverse FLS ground.
- Deer: Perimeter deer fencing allows control of internal deer numbers irrespective of external deer populations and management.
- 'Cathedral trees': (fir, larch and spruce groves) - retained for aesthetic and historic value - are increasingly impacted by storm events with potential for collateral impacts upon neighbouring infrastructure (roads, overhead cables and properties).
- Landscape/visual sensitivity: - Afforested slopes within Glen Moriston and along Loch Ness are highly visible from communities, main transport corridors and from many external vantage points and consequently sensitive to change and to unsympathetic forest design.
- Environment (designated sites): LMP area/forest bounded by Levishie oakwood - a Site of Special Scientific Interest.
- Environment (ancient woodland): Some FLS forests in Glen Moriston are within Core Pinewood areas (Achlain, Dundreggan & Achnaconeran) and contain remnants and features of high ecological value.
- Environment (ancient woodland): 40% of forest area in Glen Moriston identified as 'PAWS' (Plantation on Ancient Woodland sites) - containing fragmented native woodland and/or related ecological features/remnants.
- Environment (wildlife): FLS forests and open ground habitats support many iconic species including red squirrel, badger, pine marten, several deer and raptor species and black grouse.
- Environment (designated sites): All FLS ground within Glen Moriston is in the catchment of the River Moriston Special Area of Conservation and have potential to impact water quality and its designated features.
- Environment (open ground/peatland): Some afforested ground established on deep peat.
- Tree health/resilience: Larch and lodgepole pine trees are susceptible to virulent tree diseases which - if unchecked - have potential to adversely impact Caledonian pine and larch woodland in the wider landscape.
- Public roads/timber haulage: Auchterawe and Tomcrasky public roads are Consultation routes for timber haulage.
- LMP area change: Tomcrasky forest block is no longer owned & managed by FLS since last LMP revision.

Further issues, opportunities and challenges are expected to be identified through the external scoping process i.e. the consultation with local communities, communities of interest and statutory stakeholders (see below)

5. LMP Stakeholders

The following list of organisations

Statutory Consultees:

Scottish Forestry, NatureScot, SEPA, The Highland Council (forestry, roads, archaeology, access), Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Council, Glenurquhart Community Council.

Other Organisations

Scottish & Southern Electricity, Scottish Water, Historic Environment Scotland, BEAR Scotland, Ness District Salmon Fishery Board, Ness and Beaully Fisheries Trust, Glenmoriston Deer Management Group, Royal Society for Protection of Birds, Trees for Life, Mountaineering Council of Scotland, Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company, Glenmoriston Improvement Group, Dalchriechart Residents Association.

Neighbours

FLS access/building/land leaseholders, adjacent estates/farms and businesses with tourism, shared boundary and/or land management interests.

6. LMP Revision Time Frame

LMP revision stage	Completion Date
External Scoping	April 2024
Local presentation/discussion of evolving draft Plan	late April
Stakeholder feedback follow-up. Draft Plan evolution	April - May
Completion & notification of finalised draft LMP	early June
LMP submission to Scottish Forestry for consideration	mid-June
LMP approval	September 2024