Forestry and Land Scotland
Coilltearachd agus Fearann Alba

Morvern
Land Management Plan

Key Issues and Design Concept

The key issues shown have not been ranked in order of importance, and the comments below are intended to aid consultation and discussion. They will likely change along the way as the issues are explored.

Disease

Issue

Felling has been driven in recent years by the impact of Phytophthora ramorum (P. ramorum) a fungal disease of larch. Statutory Plant Health Notices are issued when infected trees are identified; Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) are then obliged to fell the infected trees and all larch trees within a wide buffer. In practice, wider areas need to be felled to create windfirm edges and to enable the harvesting to be carried out in practical terms.

The impact of this has been that large areas have had to be felled, in addition to the areas already felled under the previous approved Plan.

This, in turn, has impacted on the forest structure and has created logistical pressures for harvesting and restocking.

Design Concept

Design felling coupes within the framework set by past and ongoing P. ramorum infections. Identify remaining areas of larch and proactively fell. Consider the best approach for areas constraining young larch or with larch as an element of the stand, particularly where it grows in intimate mixtures with other species. Consider additional roading or tracks required to harvest larch. Consider increasing rotation lengths in non- larch crops where feasible, to even out timber supply; and identify areas for long term retention, to maintain structural diversity. Increasing rotation lengths will have to be balanced against the increased risk of windblow

Native Woodland Expansion and Restoration of Ancient Woodland Sites

Issue

Restoration of Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) to Native Woodland was an objective under previous plans and this approach will be continued under this Land Management Plan (LMP). The previous plan identified a large area of native woodland restoration and expansion at Barr. Some of this was subsequently amended to return to conifer due to policy changes and pressure from deer. Wider forest restructuring also involves an expansion of NBL, for instance along riparian corridors, and this process can be linked to PAWS restoration areas. The ecological diversity and resilience of the Native Woodland on site can also be enhanced by linking to existing or proposed Native Woodland on neighbouring land and working with Saving Movern Rainforests.

Design Concept

Review the woodland restoration and expansion area at Barr to, potentially, revert to the original plan. Restore PAWS areas and link to existing NBL and new NBL along riparian corridors. Link to NBL on neighbouring land and expand NBL along the forest margins where appropriate to improve landscape impacts and visual amenity and link NBL in the wider landscape.

Water Quality and Drinking Water Supplies

Issue

Drinking water supplies and water ecosystems can be impacted by forestry operations. Good water quality is also essential for aquatic life, including Salmon and Trout, which are found in these waters. Loch Teacuis lies within the Sunart marine SAC and is particularly sensitive to silt/pollution. Measures to buffer and enhance the riparian environment for ecological reasons also benefit water quality and the resilience of the supply.

Design Concept

Specific intake points for all water supplies served by the Forest and their associated catchments- need to be identified and mapped. This will guide both forest design and operations to safeguard water supplies, based in industry best practice and as relevant to the local site conditions. When designing the restocking proposals, build on the multiple benefits that riparian enhancement can deliver in terms of water quality, biodiversity and landscape.

Alternative Silvicultural Systems and Forest Structure

Issue

Clear felling is the standard approach for silvicultural management on the West coast of Scotland.

Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF) in contrast to clear felling, maintains tree cover in the long term and seeks to regenerate young trees by natural regeneration. CCF has several potential benefits for landscape, ecology and people. On the West coast the exposure to strong winds can limit the application of this method as it can be more vulnerable to wind damage, particularly where thinning is delayed. The areas with potential for CCF within the forest are limited.

Natural Reserves where interventions are very limited can provide ecological and structural benefits. There are no Natural Reserves in Morvern forest.

Long Term Retentions (LTR) are areas where the clear-felling rotation length is extended - this can help to increase age diversity and improve ecological value. Species groups as diverse as nesting birds of prey or bryophytes can benefit from LTRs. Stability and resilience to wind are critical factors in determining the choice of silvcultural system.

Design Concept

Continue to manage most of the forest as a Clear fell system.

Identify areas with potential for CCF where wind exposure is limited, the soils and slope are suitable and there is good management access. Only consider stands which have already been thinned or young stands where early intervention is possible to reduce the risk of wind damage.

Identify areas of diverse conifers as Long-Term Retentions in sheltered locations or where growth rates are slow.

Peat Restoration

Issue

Past forest practices have resulted in areas of deep peat being afforested, which would not be considered suitable today. There is considerable interest in the restoration of degraded, hagged, peat and damaged peat due to the loss of carbon from such sites. Restoration of these carbon emitting soils is a key element of the Scottish Gov net zero strategy. However, where tree growth is good then the net benefit from removing woodland cover - in carbon terms - is likely to be negative. In practice, felled areas are likely to have shown good growth and by default are likely to not be appropriate for peatland restoration.

Design Concept

Hagged peat on the open hill land is being assessed for potential for restoration. For afforested peat areas there is guidance on which peat types to restore e.g. raised bogs and which need further assessment to determine whether they should be replanted. This will be used to identify areas with the highest potential for restoration. Marginal sites are more likely to be converted to native woodland.

Deer Management

Issue

Deer can affect floristic diversity and the establishment of planted and naturally regenerating trees. Deer fencing is expensive and can have landscape and access issues. Deer control requires good access.

Design Concept

Work with the local Wildlife Management team to identify the current and future deer management issues and to develop a Deer Management Plan, to support the aspirations of the LMP. Native woodland expansion, open habitat restoration and alternative conifers are all more vulnerable to browsing damage.

Design options will include improving access and tracks, creating deer glades, and locating fence lines where required. The location and design of the more vulnerable species can also help to reduce impact by allowing more effective control. Maintain an effective strategic deer fence and good control within the forest to reduce the need for further internal fencing and to facilitate the establishment of a wide range of tree species and greater floristic diversity. Good roading and ranger tracks makes deer control more cost effective and provide additional informal recreational routes.

Public Access and Community

Issue

The forest is a major land use in this part of the Morvern peninsular. It provides both opportunities and potential negative impacts for the local community.

The recent community drop in was the first opportunity for the community to identify issues that could affect them and where there are opportunities for change. There is an ongoing opportunity to add further comments and ideas online. Some of the issues raised are outwith the scope or scale of this LMP and have been passed on to others in the FLS team. Many aspirations also require funding and offer opportunity for partnership working.

Issues raised to date include paths and connecting roads, timber transport, felling operations, water management, improving the biodiversity and natural habitats, Forest Crofting opportunities, opportunities for local businesses, timber buying opportunities.

Design Concept

Consider alternative silvicultural and management systems for specific sites that can enhance and/or facilitate the realisation of Community aspirations. The LMP can provide supporting evidence for applications for external funding where FLS budgets are constrained.

Landscape

Issue

Landscape is an important consideration for both residents and visitors. It has a direct aesthetic and economic significance. Many of the approaches to increase biodiversity or expand species diversity can often be synergistic to landscape in that forest features are developed related to landform and soils (such as riparian woodland or diverse conifers on better soils). Landform is therefore reflected in the forest cover and this enhances the landscape fit.

The North end of the forest falls within the Sunart Local Landscape Area although the footfall in this area or to the North is modest. The most significant landscape impacts are from Mull, The Sound of Mull and the A844 approaching from the North-East. The landscape is generally large scale with finer more intimate features associated with the riparian corridors and the lower forest margin.

The felling associated with P. ramorum (Issue 1 above) have led to a felling programme where landscape considerations were secondary to legal requirements and best disease management practice.

The past restructuring had created a diverse forest with a wide range of coupe sizes distributed across the forest. This has been disrupted by the larger scale Phytophthora fellings. The options for future management and coupe design are constrained by this current forest structure and the need to work to windfirm edges. This limits the opportunities for landscaping.

Design Concept

Strengthen natural features in the landscape at restocking with the emphasis on riparian zones.

With the loss of larch as a species option, consider ways to include more visual diversity and Autumn colour in the forest. This could be achieved using more Birch or Aspen in pure stands related to landform features or in mixture with conifers such as Scots pine and Norway Spruce.

Consider ways to diversify the future landscape by designing future coupe boundaries into restock areas and use diverse species and open ground to highlight landform. Respect the large scale of the landscape where appropriate.

Biodiversity, Designated Sites and Protected Species

Issue

The forest is home to a wide range of species including European Protected species and Schedule 1 raptors. There are a designated Conservation sites, SAC and SSSI – for both terrestrial and marine interests, along the margins of the forest. PAWS restoration has been discussed in point 2 above.

Design Concept

Restore PAWS and expand Native Broadleaves as per point 2 above.

Consider the restocking of areas in the proximity of designated sites to reduce adverse impacts such as non-native regeneration seed sources and altered drainage, and to enhance ecological links. Work with neighbouring land managers to control Invasive species where budgets allow, in particular Rhododendron.

Timber Production

Issue

The forest area is very suitable to produce high volumes of timber with good soils and climate and generally gentle to moderate slopes. The scale of the forest means that it is an important sustainable strategic timber resource, contributing to the regional economy and employment. The internal road network is well established and ongoing transport links by sea or road are available.

Timber production not only creates a sustainable timber product, it also provides a product that substitutes for carbon intensive steel and concrete. The very rapid growth rate of Sitka Spruce also leads to a very high rate of carbon capture across the forest, the significance of which is increased by the large scale of the forest.

Design Concept

Maintain a critical mass of productive forest with a sustained and steady rate of annual production. Consider the impact of timber movement on the public road network in planning

scale and sequence of felling. Diversity conifer species on suitable soils and sites for future resilience. Balance reductions in the productive area against other benefits.

Archaeology

Issue

A range of features occur across the forest with the township at Loch Doire nan Mart being a Scheduled Monument.

Forest cover and operations can have an impact on the preservation and aesthetic setting of archaeology.

Design Concept

Consider ways to enhance the setting of the township and open views to key landmarks. Improve the setting of unscheduled archaeology and consider open ground links to roads and paths, to improve public access to the best sites.