

Dalchork LMP

Revision progress update

Introduction

The main focus of this update are the two maps (February 24 felling and restocking update) that accompany this document, showing the proposed felling and restocking during the plan period (2024-2034). Please compare these with the previous maps, available on the consultation webpage. This is the second round of stakeholder communication for the plan revision, following the initial round last August. Once the plan has been completed and submitted to Scottish Forestry, it will sit on the public registry for 30 days, allowing a final round of feedback.

Peatland restoration

Following further internal discussion we remain committed to restoring as much of Dalchork to functioning peatland as possible, though now over 15 – 20 years rather than the 10 initially envisaged. This is largely due to the sensitive nature of the land around Loch Beannach – a SSSI and water supply for the town of Lairg – and not wanting to outpace the funding available for peatland restoration.

Felling

As much of the standing crop in Dalchork is of a similar age and quality, the main deciding factor about when to fell has been whether or not we wish to restore the land beneath to peatland. These areas have therefore been prioritised.

The UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) stipulates that the land within a drinking water catchment should not be felled at a rate of more than 20% in any three year period. The forest intended for peatland restoration within the Loch Beannach catchment has therefore been couped and phased in such a way that this condition is not breached.

Restocking

There is a much greater focus on planting native woodland in this plan, incorporating broadleaves and Scots pine wherever possible. This will allow us to build up a landscape-scale seed source that in time will encourage natural regeneration across the plan area. As partners in the Riverwoods initiative, we are aiming to incorporate native woodland buffer strips within standing crops to shield the watercourses from forest operations, and to improve the habitat for the species that utilise them. We will buffer peatland with low density native species, to guard against forestry operations and infill of non-native species.

Where watercourses cross open peatland, we will endeavour to micro-site native species on exposed mineral soils, but not onto deep peat. It is not possible to map ahead of time all the places where these pockets will occur, but following planting we will record the location and update our records accordingly.

In previous rotations, we have relied heavily on ploughing, fertilising and Lodgepole pine to grow a successful timber crop. We no longer do the first two of those, and as continued widespread use of Lodgepole pine is incompatible with the stated goal of peatland restoration, we are winding down the use of this species in this block wherever possible. The focus will therefore turn to a slower growing mix of Sitka spruce and Scots pine in the main, with an allowance for Norway spruce where possible. Lodgepole pine will still regenerate across the site, and we will incorporate it into the species mix where it is likely to benefit the crop.

Please note the restocking map indicate broad areas of species choice, and that mixes will not be intimate for silvicultural reasons. All productive conifer areas will have a 10% broadleaf component, as per the UKFS.

Summary

The timeframe has slipped forward by one month from the original draft – we are now targeting submission to Scottish Forestry by March 2024. Please get in touch with me at David.walker@forestryandland.gov.scot with any queries, thoughts or requests for further information.

5. Time Frame

What	When
Scoping	July 2023
Draft Plan Completion	October 2023
Consultation	November 2023
Review Draft	December 2023
Internal Review	January 2024
Submission	March 2024