

South Loch Ness 2023 Revision Land Management Plan Brief

Introduction

This brief gives an outline for the Land Management Plan (LMP) revision of the South Loch Ness forests and Land managed by Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS). In this brief the proposed vision and background will be outlined and the project timeline provided. The purpose of this brief is to ensure all stakeholders are informed of the revision process, the potential changes to management and have the ability to feed in to the process at an early stage.

This document is accompanied by 5 maps;

- Map 1 – Location
- Map 2 – Key Features
- Map 3 – Management Coupes (to be revised)
- Map 4 – Future Habitats and Species (to be revised)

1. Project scope

This LMP revision will result in the new plan that will run from 2024-2034. The new plan will realign with the any changes in strategy, policy and guidance implemented over the last decade. FLS will ensure the new plan is in line with [Scotland's Forestry Strategy](#) (2019-2029), [Forestry and Land Scotland's Corporate Plan](#) (2022-2025). It will be delivered in accordance with the [United Kingdom Forestry Standard](#) (UKFS) and the [United Kingdom Woodland Assurance Standard](#) (UKWAS).

The main outputs from the revision will be the felling and restocking proposals of which the old versions are shown in maps 3 and 4. We will also be reviewing our approach to the management

of designated and environmentally valuable sites, tree health, invasive non-native species, civil engineering work and engagement with local communities. This to be updated through both internal and external consultation as well as desk and site based research.

The LMP process can be split up in four stages; Scoping, Draft, Consultation, Final plan submission. Currently the South Loch Ness is in the Scoping stage. At this stage FLS is looking for input from stakeholders regarding their ambitions and plans relating to the National Forests and Land and any issues or opportunities.

Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS) applications, community agreements, renewable agreements and leases will not be part of the LMP revision. These will be processed alongside the LMP revision and where necessary might influence one another.

2. Background

The South Loch Ness Land Management Plan area is situated in Inverness-shire, on the South shore of Loch Ness. The LMP Area covers a total of 4,388 ha of largely mixed coniferous woodland with some open hill ground above Erchite. The forest within the plan stretch from Knockie in the south along the southern shore of Loch Ness almost to Dores in the North and stretching to Whitebridge and Errogie in the East. There is a small outlying block to the East at Drumnaglass. The forests are predominantly productive and of high significance for biodiversity with the plan area supporting a number of protected species. There are multiple designated sites within the LMP which includes SSSI's, SPA's and SAC's. As the forest is on the banks of Loch Ness it forms a prominent feature in the local landscape. It also forms a back drop to Loch Ness and is very visible from the popular A82 and Urquhart Castle. The rivers of Farigaig and Foyers run through the forest area and drain into Loch Ness. The alternative tourist route from Inverness to Fort Augustus, the B852, runs through the LMP area and there is high recreational use and the South Loch Ness Trail passes through the plan area.

South Loch Ness forest covers a total of 4,388 ha of which the details of which can be found below in Figure 1.

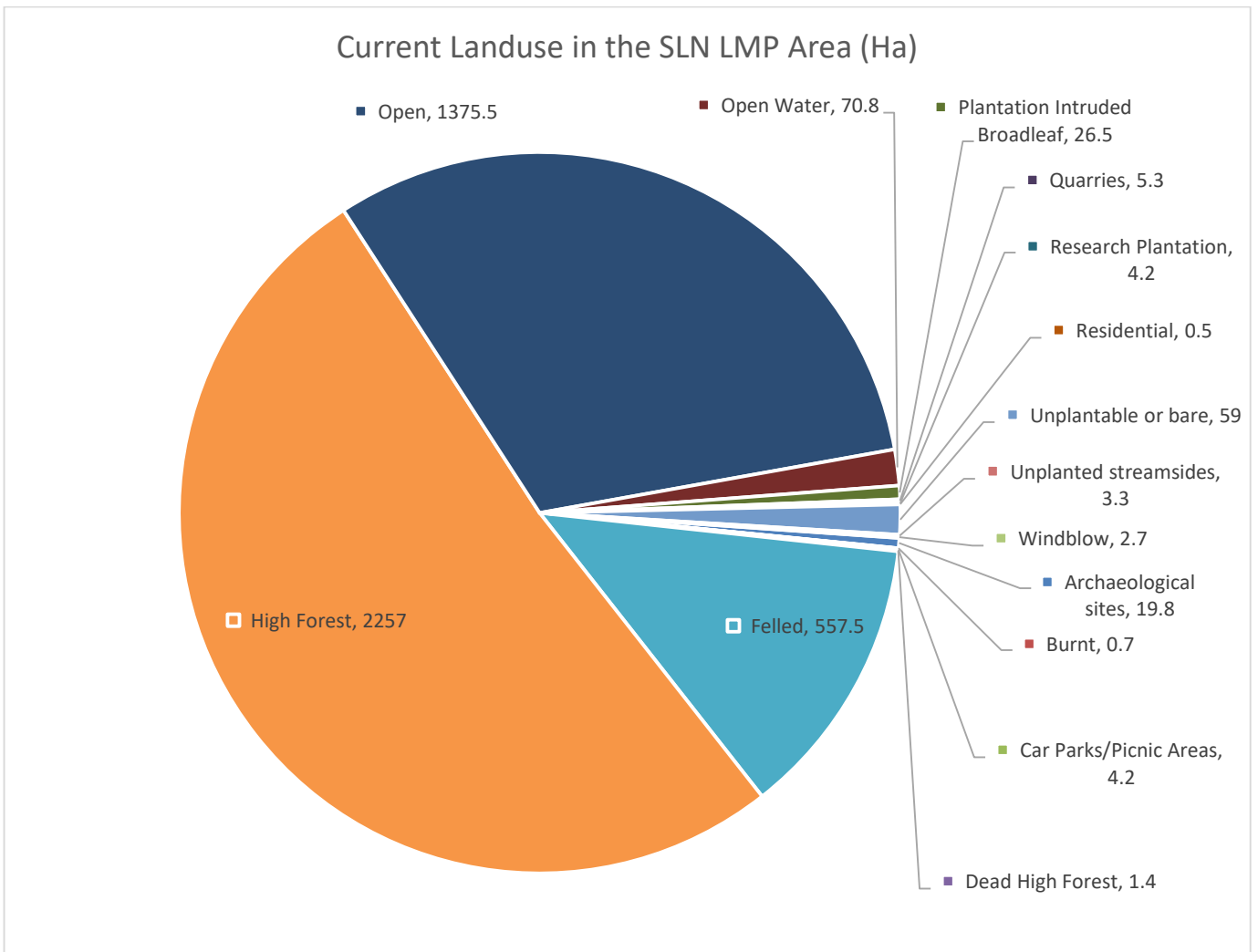


Figure 1: Current land use in the SLN LMP Area

This chart shows the current land uses within the South Loch Ness LMP area. High forests makes up 2257 ha, open ground 1375.5 Ha, 557.5 Ha open ground, 70 ha of open water, 59 ha of unplantable or bare ground, 26.5 ha of plantation intruded broadleaves and 19.8 Ha of Archaeological sites. Any remaining land uses do not occupy any more than 10 ha.

There is a long history of forestry and tree cover at South Loch Ness as can be seen on Map 2 – Key Features. The share of Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) and Long-Established woodlands of Plantation Origin (LEPO) on this map demonstrate areas of long established forest.

In figure 3 the age class distribution is demonstrated. This visualizes the current spread of forest age throughout the LMP area. As can be seen there is a large area within the 61-80 and 81-100 year brackets which reflects the large area of mature Scots Pine on the central spine of the Black Isle.

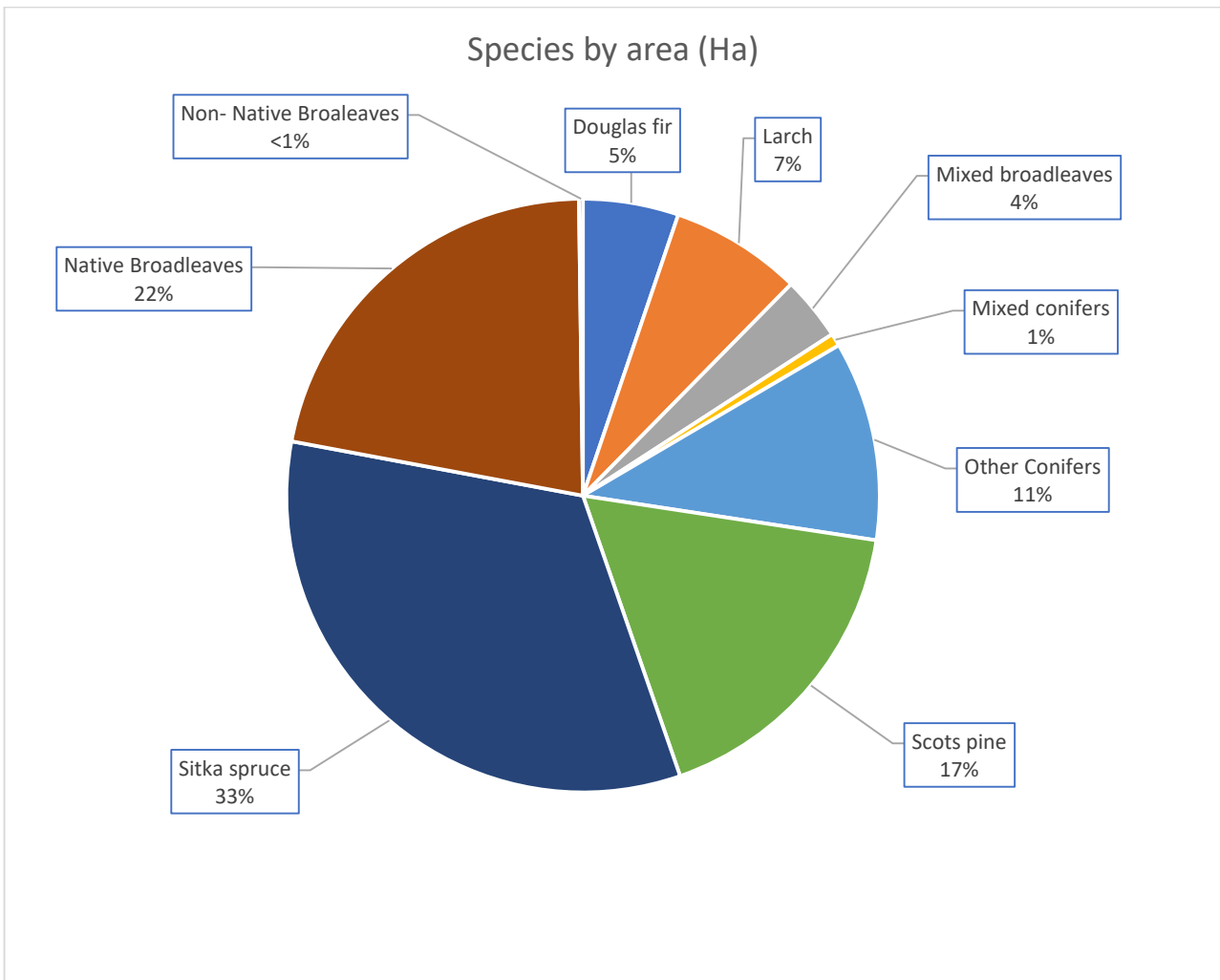


Figure 2: Current Species Composition in percentage of the forested land in the South Loch Ness LMP Area

This chart shows the area of different tree species which are present across the LMP area by percentage. 33% Sitka spruce, 22% native broadleaves, 17% Scots pine, other conifers 11%, larch 7%, Douglas fir 5%, mixed broadleaves 4% and mixed conifers 1%.

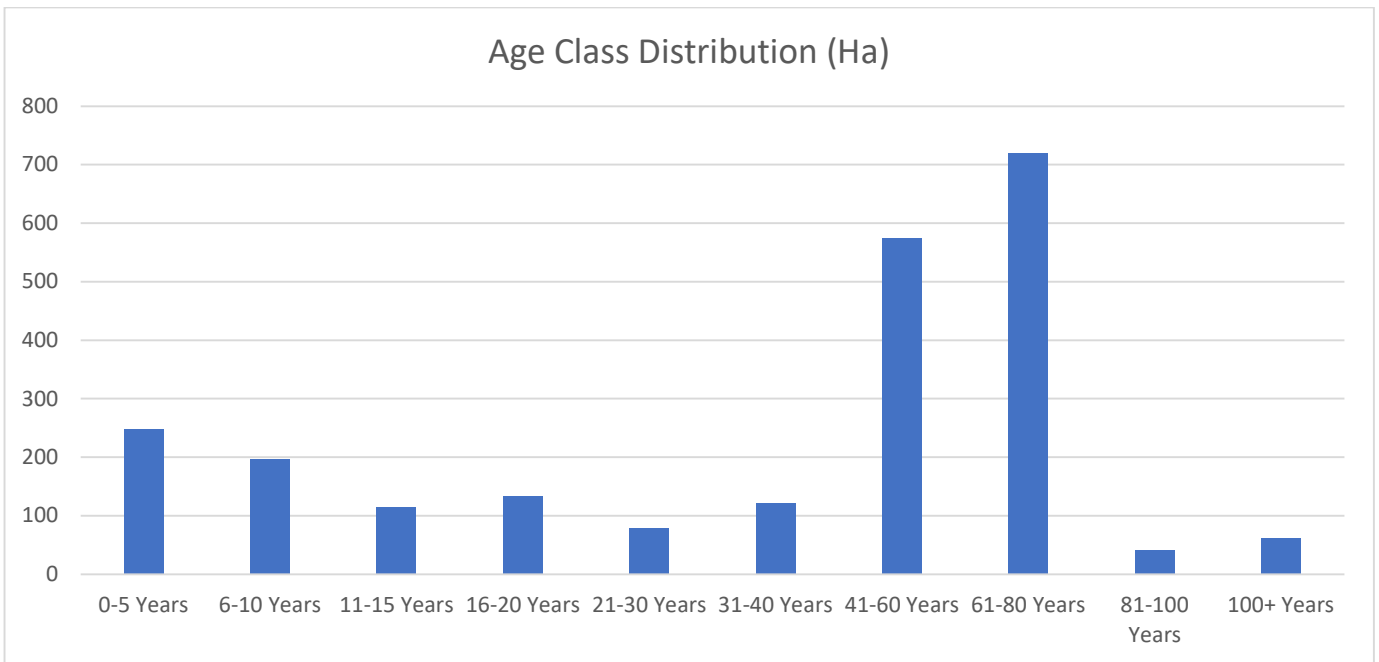


Figure 3: Age distribution per hectare for forested land in the South Loch Ness LMP area.

This chart shows the age class distribution across the LMP area in Ha. The largest group is 61-80 years with the 2nd largest 41- 60 years with the remainder of the categories remaining fairly similar.

The forests and lands managed by FLS within South Loch Ness are actively used by a large variety of users. Most of the recreation is by local communities as the forests are accessible to villages. The local communities are engaged with the woodland through various community trusts, outdoor access groups.

The following designated sites are in or in the sphere of influence of the South Loch Ness LMP area:

- Ness Wood SAC/SSSI
- Loch Bran SSSI
- Inverfarigaig SSSI.

In addition there is a Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the South Loch Ness LMP area: Dun Deardail- Prehistoric domestic and defensive fort.

3. Draft Vision

10 Year vision

The main objectives of the South Loch Ness LMP will remain as they were but with a slight shift of focus. The area has always been valuable for environment, recreation and timber production and it will still contribute strongly to all three. Considering the ongoing climate and biodiversity crises adaptation to climate change and protection of the environment and biodiversity will form an important element of the new plan. This will be achieved by increasing the woodland resilience to pest diseases and wildfire. Phytophthora Ramorum is a disease which affects larch and can kill the infected trees, as shown by figure 2 Larch Spp makes up roughly 5% of the tree species within the plan area. The Great Glen is a key corridor through which Phytophthora Ramorum will move from the west to east coast so the removal of larch spp within the plan area will be key to help protect against the spread of P. Ram.

There are areas within the LMP which are not currently accessible for timber extraction such as the Camus and areas above the B 852. Access into these blocks are key to help achieve multiple objectives within the plan. The Camus block is currently inaccessible as historic access is no longer suitable for modern timber haulage lorries, access will need to be secured in order to fell the trees to increase resilience and begin the restoration of PAWS woodland within the block. Coupes above the B 865 are planted on unstable slopes with a high percentage of larch which could increase the spread of P. Ramorum as well as threaten the access along the B 865.

The environmental features within the plan will continue to be of high quality and preserved with utmost care, where possible areas of Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) will be restored following national guidance with the removal of Invasive non native species and planting of only native species.

The landscape value of the LMP and surrounding area will be enhanced with key viewpoints maintained and all felling coupes designed with landscape value as a key consideration.

Unique open habitats within the LMP area will remain a priority for conservation in the next 10 years. Areas of degraded peat will be identified and restored. Standing Deadwood volumes will increase to further enhance the biodiversity in the area.

Forestry and Land Scotland will continue to work with partners to optimize recreational usage in the area. Whilst no new facilities are planned improvement and maintenance of facilities will be carried out collaboratively with communities. Where possible communities will work together with FLS to benefit the local community.

50 Year vision

The biodiversity and quality of the native woodlands, open habitats and designated sites will have improved due to continuous effort of managing open space, rewetting, removal of invasive non-native species and increased age and species diversity. The resilience of these ecologically

valuable areas will have increased due to complementary management on adjacent ground. Populations of red squirrel as well as species associated with deadwood are thriving as a result of proactive management to benefit these species.

The forests within the South Loch Ness LMP area will be actively used by the local communities for recreation; Walking, mountain biking, horse riding and other forms of recreation will be commonplace.

The overall age distribution of the forest will be more varied with better access into coupes allowing for more timely interventions.

4. Key Issues and Opportunities

During the internal scoping a variety of issues and objectives have been identified. The most important ones are discussed in further detail below.

- Work across organisation and with local developers to find solutions to access issues into currently inaccessible coupes. This in turn will increase resilience to pests, diseases, fire and windblow.
- Large areas of LMP are on slopes down to Loch Ness which are very visible from the popular north side of the Loch. The forest provides a back drop to Loch Urquhart castle.
- Where possible areas of PAWS will be restored to native woodlands.
- Work closely with local communities to minimise impact of timber operations and maintain local access for recreation.
- Work with neighbours to reduce deer numbers to allow regeneration of native species in designated areas.
- 7% of the species on the plan area is larch. We would look to reduce this throughout the plan to increase resilience to Phytophthora ramorum
- Multiple SSSI's are within the LMP area and we will look to improve the condition of these.
- Maximise peatland restoration where restocking is no longer advisable.

5. Time Frame

What	When
Scoping	November 2023
Draft Plan Completion	February 2024
Consultation	March 2024
Review Draft	March- May 2024
Submission	May 2024