

Forest Enterprise Scotland

Managing the National Forest Estate


Moray & Aberdeenshire Forest District Bennachie

Analysis and concept map

Date: January 2017

Scale: 1:18,000 at A1

O.S. Grid Ref NJ 670217

-  Scheduled monuments
-  Parking
-  Visitor centre
-  Powerlines
-  Forest roads
-  Paths
-  Watercourses
-  Boundaries
-  Welcome visitor zone
-  Interactive visitor zone
-  Passive visitor zone
-  Ponds
-  DNB
-  SSSI
-  PAWS
-  LISS old plan
-  Natural reserve
-  Broadleaves only
-  Adjacent woodland
-  Rich nutrient soil
-  Felled areas

The age class at Back O' Bennachie is fairly even over this area. Larch and Pine are the main species and are growing very well over the middle and lower part of the slopes. In some areas, natural regeneration of Sitka Spruce is growing very well.

The age class at Back O' Bennachie could be diversified. This would increase age diversity and help avoid clearfelling large areas in the future. A felling programme could start to be undertaken from now onwards. It is also possible to do Low Impact Silviculture Systems in some area of Back O' Bennachie. Where Sitka is regenerating, it could be managed in mixture with the 60 years old larch and pine until the last stage of the rotation.

Some areas of the site have a very high recreation value. This includes the car parks, the trails and the picnic areas. The species and age class along these areas are diverse.

The management of these parts of Bennachie will be maintained and monitored in order to provide a great experience to the public. The species could be maintained and chosen to create a nice atmosphere for walking, running, riding or cycling. The preferred species would be native such as native broadleaves or scots pine.

Bennachie is a key feature in the surrounding landscape. It is composed of a series of Craigs which form a dominant relief in the landscape. There are large areas of open ground at the top of the slopes covered by montane heath which is a habitat dominated by heather.

The boundary between the open ground and the forest at the top of the hill is key in the landscape. Also, forest operations, coupe size and shape will therefore need to be taken carefully into account in order to keep the right balance so as to keep the original value and character of the landscape.

Several archaeological sites with a very high historical value are located within the site. Some of them are of national importance such as the Mither tap fort, others include ring-ditch houses and a cross-incised stone of prehistoric date.

The management of the land surrounding these scheduled monuments will follow the archaeological UK forestry standards guidelines. These guidelines are designed to preserve monuments of national interest.

Access can be an issue over the site. Some productive crops have been planted far away from the forest roads. If the road is too far from the trees it becomes very expensive to thin and harvest the area.

Remote areas should be clearfelled when the financial value of the crop is optimal. These crops could be replaced by species which do not need a high monitoring and management standard. Therefore, native woodland with a higher environmental value could be more adapted in this situation. Some of these areas could also be classified as long term retention woodland sites.

A Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS) is located in the South West of the site. This PAWS area is located along the boundary of an SSSI. The non native species planted over this area are spruces and douglas firs.

The UK Forestry standard guidelines aim to restore the PAWS into native woodland. Therefore, this area should be converted into a woodland composed of native species such as Oak, Birch or Pine. The non native species should therefore be replaced by native species.

The South of the site is covered with high quality crops of Norway and Sitka Spruce, Douglas Fir and Larch. The Crops are fairly even in nature. The 70 year old spruce is now starting to blow down along the west side of the hill.

This part of the site is ideal to grow a high quality timber. Species such as Douglas Fir, Norway or Sitka Spruce and productive broadleaves are growing very well. Such species could therefore be used to restock felled areas.

Several watercourses cross over the site. Native broadleaves have been planted along them in the past. However, non native species such as Sitka spruce are still present along the watercourses.

Watercourses are sensitive habitats and are connected to a wider water catchment. The management of the forest and open habitats along the watercourse has therefore an impact on other parts of the region. As stipulated in the UK forestry standards, habitats along watercourses will be restored and restocked with native broadleaves where possible.

Bennachie is very exposed to the wind. Windblow is frequent all over the site. The tallest trees growing on wet soils are most affected. Also, the trees recently exposed to the wind along the clearfells edges are vulnerable. The worst winds tend to come from the west and blow the trees exposed along this edge of the crops. Sitka Spruce seems to be the most affected species by windblow. Pines and Larch tend to be more resilient.

The wind will need to be taken into account in the management of the site. Felling coupes should be clearfelled preferably from east to west in order to leave a shelterbelt of trees to the west. Clearfelling areas as small as possible could also help to minimise the impact for the landscape.