

Glenelg Peninsula 2022/23 Revision

Land Management Plan 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 on the Glenelg peninsula. At the outset of the Plan revision process, the Brief provides an indication of the general intended direction of management (i.e. a long term Vision), a list of some of the key issues and factors that influence this current direction and analysis of the current composition of the land in terms of its use and the diversity of tree species and ages within its component woodlands.

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

The Brief is accompanied by 4 maps;

Map 1 – Location

Map 2 – Key Features and Issues

Map 3 – Indicative Felling

Map 4 – Indicative Future Habitats and Species

1. Project scope

The LMP revision process will ultimately result in a new Plan being approved for the period 2023 to 2033. In terms of adherence to national forest policy and regulation, the new plan will be aligned with the [Scotland's Forestry Strategy](#) (2019-2029), [Forestry and Land Scotland's Corporate Plan](#) (2022-2025) and 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 LMP revision are new felling and restocking proposals for the next ten years. **Maps 3 and 4** show how this work would be enacted if the long term management proposals given in the *last* Plan were continued without further alteration through this current revision process (i.e. they are 'indicative'). We will also review our management of designated and environmentally valuable sites within the LMP area; how we manage or anticipate tree health issues and the control of non-native plant species; and what civil engineering work is envisaged to deliver the management proposed. A record of the engagement undertaken with local and statutory stakeholders is maintained throughout the review process and this record is ultimately incorporated as an appendix in the final published Plan.

The LMP revision process can be split into four distinct stages: Scoping, Drafting, Consultation and Submission. Currently the Glenelg Peninsula LMP is in the Scoping stage - when FLS is looking for input from stakeholders regarding their own ambition and recommendations as they relate to the landholding.

Any interest in a potential Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS) application, new renewable energy proposals or the management of on-site public access and recreation infrastructure do not form part of the LMP revision process which, as the name implies, is focussed essentially on land management. Nevertheless FLS would welcome any comments or ideas in this regard as these can be passed to relevant FLS staff for further consideration and engagement.

2. Background

FLS' Glenelg Peninsula landholdings extend to 2,677 hectares - occupying two distinct areas (see **Map 1**) – Ardintoul/Bernera and Moyle/Ratagan/Letterfearn. The current composition of land use is presented below in Figure 1:-

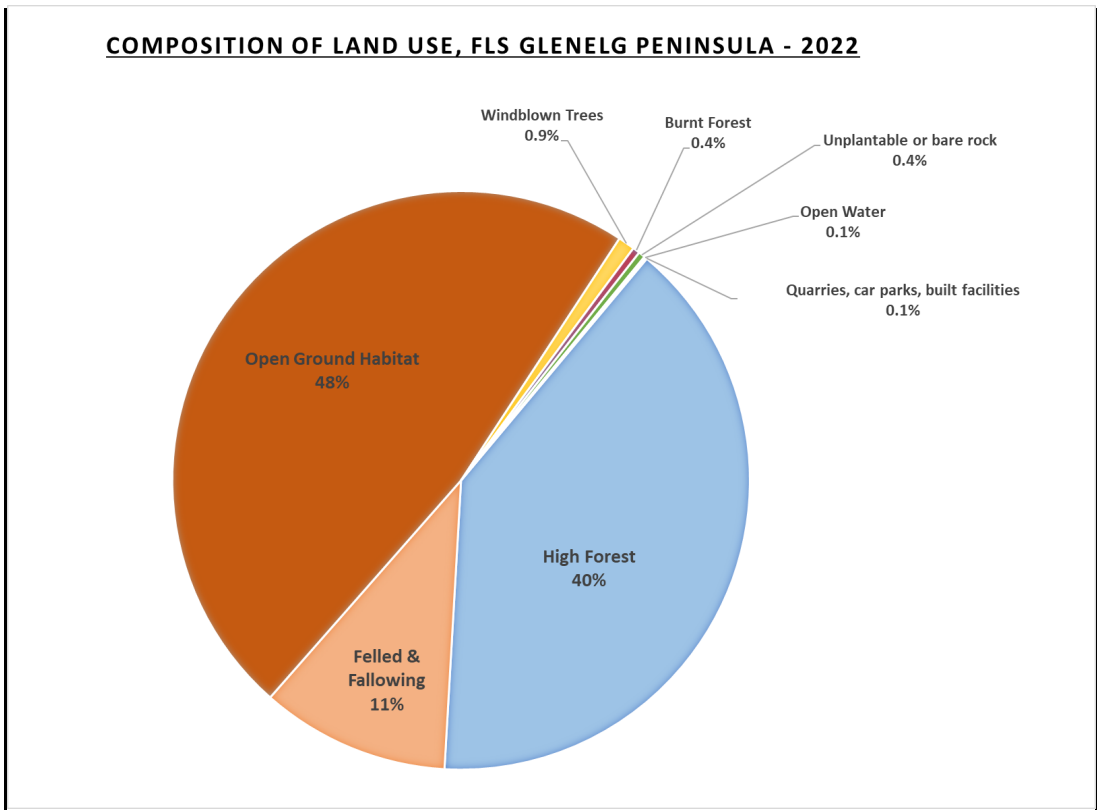


Figure 1: Current land use in FLS' Glenelg Peninsula LMP area

As depicted, roughly half (51%) of the land area is either standing High Forest or currently felled awaiting trees either by restocking or natural regeneration. 'High Forest' includes areas of native woodland as well as coniferous woodland that has been planted during the twentieth century and is currently managed primarily for timber production.

The composition of tree species within all forest areas (i.e. 'High Forest' and 'Fallow' categories) is shown in the chart below:-

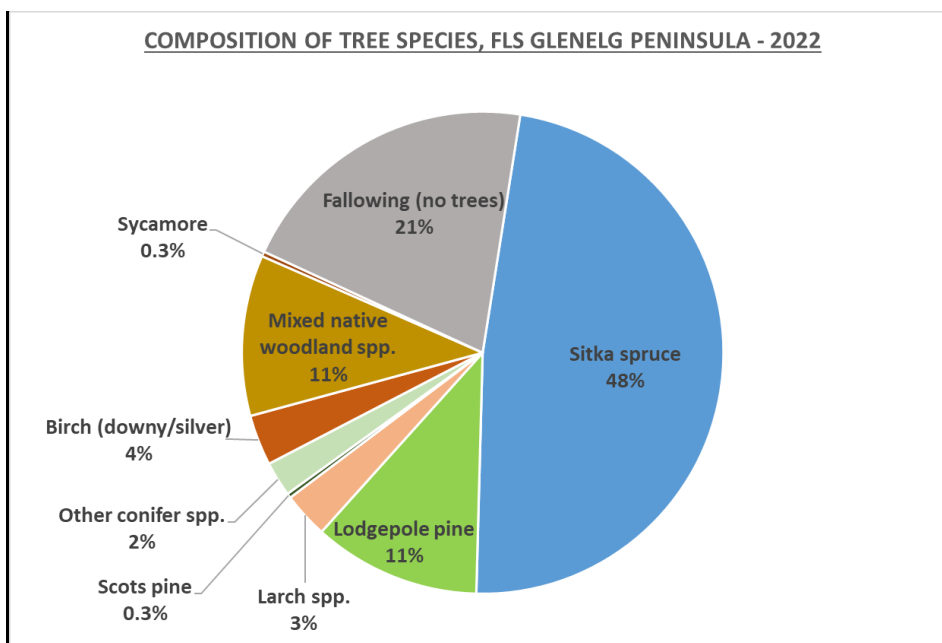


Figure 2: Current tree species composition as a percentage of forested land in FLS' Glenelg Peninsula LMP area.

Map 2 – Key Features and Issues also shows where the areas of ancient semi-natural woodland are located in the LMP area as well as Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) and Long-Established woodland of Plantation Origin (LEPO).

Figure 3 illustrates the age class distribution of trees in the High Forest category and gives an indication of the diversity of forest habitat present as different flora and fauna can require specific woodland conditions (age, stature, shade, humidity, longevity etc) to persist and thrive.

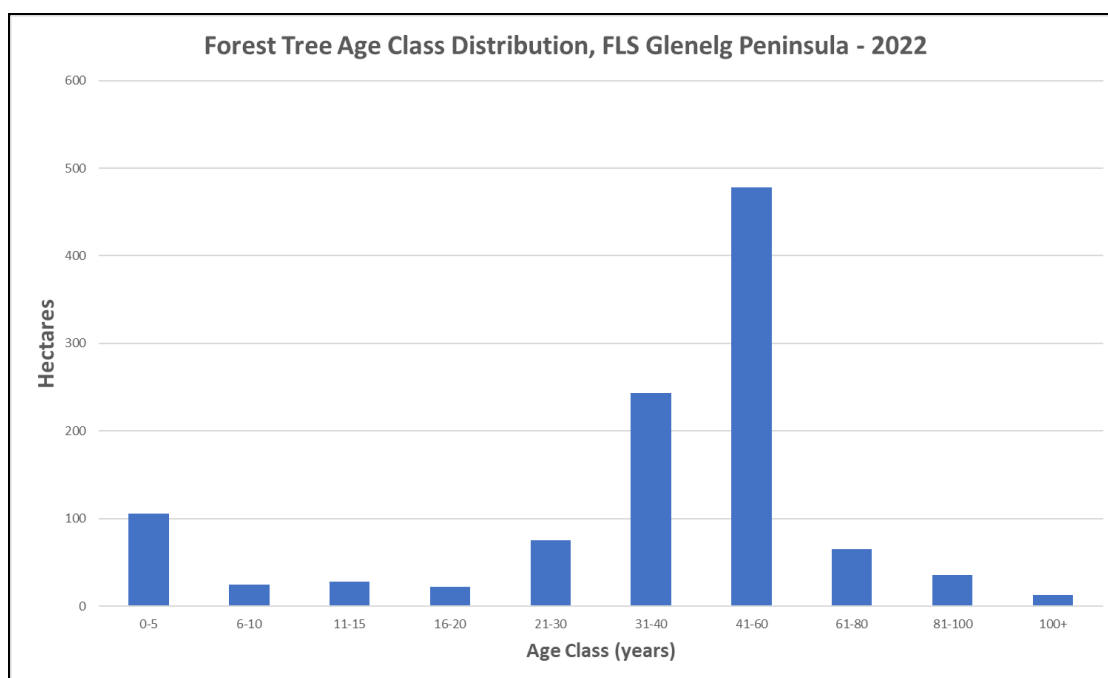


Figure 3: Current Age Class distribution for forested land in FLS' Glenelg Peninsula LMP area.

As this chart shows, a large proportion of trees are between 30 and 60 years old. This reflects the dominance in extent of non-native coniferous forest (see also Fig. 2 - Species Composition) and an intensive period of afforestation undertaken by the Forestry Commission between the mid-1960's and the 1990's. In addition, these productive timber forests are typically felled at between 40 and 60 years of age (dictated by growth rate) and explains the dramatic decrease in trees aged over sixty years old.

The forests and land managed by FLS on the Glenelg peninsula are actively used by walkers, runners and cyclists. Most of year-round informal recreation is undertaken by local residents and from other Lochalsh and Skye communities. Visitor numbers increase significantly during peak (spring to autumn) tourist season. A 10 km coastal trail linking the Glenelg ferry crossing point via Ardintoul to Totaig is the LMP's longest distance route, with circular loops possible using forest roads to return to the starting point. In the easterly forests - above the villages of Ratagan and Letterfearn - there are numerous forest roads to explore but limited circular walking opportunities on account of the (often very) steep slopes providing a practical return loop(s). Moyle forest has a more developed network of forest roads allowing different circular route options albeit in a more enclosed and continuous conifer forest environment. Local community group Lochalsh Trails Club organises and hosts annual running event 'The Dirty 30' at a variety of locations across Lochalsh. This attracts significant numbers of contestants and uses parts of Moyle and Ardintoul forests for some of its stages. The chambered broch Caisteal Grugaig is a scheduled ancient monument on the coastal trail near Totaig and has both online and on-site interpretation and is well-frequented.

The following designated sites are in, or in the sphere of influence of, the Glenelg Peninsula LMP area (see **Map 2** – Key Features & Issues for locations):

- Kintail - *National Scenic Area*
- Lochs Duich, Long and Alsh - *Special Area of Conservation & Site of Special Scientific Interest*
- Caisteal Grugaig chambered broch - *Scheduled Ancient Monument*.

3. Draft Vision

10 Year vision

The current (expiring) forest plan acknowledges the valuable role that the area plays in terms of wildlife conservation, recreation provision and timber production and FLS expects the new Plan to continue to prioritise these three primary objectives. The landscape impact of our management is a particular sensitivity to be accounted for in our planning, not only on account of the National Scenic Area designation covering the eastern seaboard of the LMP area but because of the prominent backdrop the entire peninsula affords to the residents and very many travellers on the northern shores of Lochs Duich and Alsh and to the west at Kylerhea on Skye.

Tree felling for timber production (see **Map 3** – Indicative Felling) will continue to be focussed in areas adjacent to the often fragmented coastal and ravine-bound native woodlands. This offers an opportunity to expand and increase inter-connectivity of these remnants in the design of follow-on productive- and conservation-oriented woodland areas (see **Map 4** – Indicative Future Habitat). Deer control will be maintained to keep internal populations below a level that allows

natural regeneration of these expanding native woodland margins as well as restocked non-native productive woodland. In the forests above Ratagan and Leachachan, the sequential programme of clear felling of expansive, maturing stands of productive conifers will continue to employ complex technical working solutions in the safe working and recovery of timber products from these steep slopes. 'Follow-on' woodland design on this flank will likewise aim to rationalise areas of future productive timber and increase the extent and inter-connectivity of native woodland along upper treelines, lower coastal/community fringes and bisecting watercourses for aesthetic, amenity and environmental gains.

During the new Plan period, the main Fort Augustus-Skye overhead electricity line - which traverses some areas of the landholding - is due for removal once a new upgraded power line has been installed. FLS will work collaboratively with the utility company to design and deliver this project in a way that best integrates new powerline infrastructure - and its new access for maintenance - with the ongoing and long term ambitions of FLS for the landholding. The condition of trails, signboards, access infrastructure and heritage features (including unscheduled features e.g. the Wade's bridges on the Mam Ratagan road) will have been routinely monitored throughout the Plan period with any remedial works required, to protect the public and conserve these features, undertaken in a timely manner.

Finally the ongoing climate change emergency and biodiversity crisis require FLS to plan to ensure the landholding remains resilient to anticipated changes or is modified (and adapted) in an effort to safeguard communities, visitors, wildlife and their underpinning habitats. This will result in an increase in the amount and variety of different (sometimes novel) tree species planted in future productive woodland whilst existing semi-natural habitats (both woodland and open ground) will be managed not only to conserve condition but ensuring ecological function is healthy, promoted and – as a result – more resilient to adverse change. In particular areas of ploughed, afforested deep peat - identified during this Plan review process - will be proposed for deforestation and restoration and open heath communities suffering encroachment by non-native tree and shrub regeneration will be assessed for a programme of prioritised removal to begin to resolve this issue.

50 Year vision

The quality and biodiversity of the native woodlands and open habitats has improved through continued monitoring of browsing impacts and corresponding adjustment in required deer management. Once-fragmented coastal native woodland is a more extensive and continuous habitat left to self-perpetuate with minimal intervention save for management to eradicate any new, potentially negative factors/influences (e.g. rhododendron incursion and spread). Riparian woodland corridors will also be much expanded, providing an ability for constituent species to move more easily through the landscape. Previously afforested areas on peat with depths in excess of 50 cm are now clear of trees and old drainage channels blocked to re-wet and restore functionality in these bog habitats. The preceding five decades of sequential conifer woodland felling (in comparatively small piecemeal coupes dispersed across the landholding) will have resulted in a productive forest mosaic with broader age and species diversity located and managed sympathetically to its wider landscape context. The arrival, potential spread and impact of novel tree pests and diseases may still necessitate controlled removal of affected trees/tree species in an effort to eradicate, or at least control, the threat. However the scale of these interventions will

be comparatively small - and so less visually, environmentally and economically impactful - because of increasingly age- and species-diversified productive woodland. With more extreme and changeable weather (i.e. increased frequency of storm events, increased rainfall duration and intensity, extending periods of warmer, drier summer conditions), FLS continue to manage and, where necessary, upgraded access infrastructure, forest drainage and culverts to safely accommodate new extremes of the changing climate.

The Glenelg Peninsula LMP area continues to provide continuous opportunity for informal recreation for local communities and its seasonal influx of other visitors. With public access thresholds (with picnic sites, trails, car parks and interpretation) being developed and managed sympathetically to the natural setting and maintained to give high quality visitor experience. Opportunities for local communities to get involved in deciding the future direction of forest and land management will hopefully be benefitting both FLS, as principle land managers, and the communities seeking those opportunities.

4. Key Issues and Opportunities

During preliminary internal discussion of the LMP revision, staff involved in previous and future management contributed a list of key issues they considered formative, or 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:

- Scheduled ancient monument: Caisteal Grugaig;
- Terrain to the south-west of Loch Duich is within the Kintail National Scenic Area and is a prominent backdrop to users of the main Skye-Inverness road and to settlements on the northern shores of lochs Duich and Alsh;
- Extensive but often isolated/fragmented networks of native woodland in riparian corridors and on steep slopes coastal slopes. Expansion, and increased connectivity, typically limited by presence (i.e. proximity and extent) of non-native coniferous woodland stands;
- 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*);
- Moyle forest road network is a local authority severe weather contingency public transport route for Glenelg communities;
- Moyle forest – a large conifer forest with good timber-producing capability and comparatively limited visual sensitivity on account of limited public vantage points overlooking the forest;
- Two FLS viewpoint locations at Mam Ratagan affording long distance panoramic views including the Five Sisters;
- Overhead powerlines include sections of the main Fort Augustus-Skye/W Isles electricity supply which is due for upgrade during the next Plan period;
- Perimeter deer fencing allows control of internal deer numbers to achieve forest management objectives irrespective of external deer populations and management;
- Limited/constrained use of (some) public road for timber haulage as well as busy summer tourist traffic.
- Forests on these coastal slopes (*map label points at eastern flank of the Kylerhea Narrows*) are a highly visible backdrop to popular tourist destinations: Kylerhea-Glenelg ferry and Kylerhea Wildlife Hide and picnic site;
- Lochs Duich, Long and Alsh SAC – the lochs contain an extensive area of extremely sheltered reefs within a fjordic loch system.

5. Time Frame

What	When
External Scoping (commences)	November 2022
Stakeholder feedback follow-up. Draft Plan evolution	December 2022 – February 2023
Local presentation of draft Plan	Late February 2023
Feedback incorporated into final draft & internal review	March 2023
LMP submission for approval to Scottish Forestry	By April 2023