



Forestry and
Land Scotland
Coilltearachd agus
Fearann Alba

West Region

Strategic Plan for Scotland's National Forest and Land in North Argyll

Covering Brecklet, Glenachulish, Duror, Bealach, Appin and Glen Creran forests

We manage Scotland's National Forest Estate to the United Kingdom Woodland Assurance Standard – the standard endorsed in the UK by the international Forest Stewardship Council® and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification. We are independently audited.

Our land management plans bring together key information, enable us to evaluate options and plan responsibly for the future. We welcome comments on these plans at any time.



The mark of
responsible forestry





Contents

FORESTRY AND LAND SCOTLAND – Strategic Plan for Scotland’s NFL in North Argyll

1. Introduction	2
2. Summary.....	2
3. Achieving national priorities locally	6
4. Vision for the North Argyll forests	8
5. Strategic priorities	8
6. Key management objectives	9
7. Appendices.....	separate documents

1. Introduction

The Strategic Plan covers six forest blocks: Brecklet, Glenachulish, Duror (incorporating Lagnaha), Bealach, Appin and Glen Creran, part of Scotland's National Forests and Land that is managed by Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) on behalf of the Scottish Government. Creran and Appin lie within Argyll and Bute, while the other forests are in the Highland Council administrative area. *See Map 1: Location of Strategic Plan Area.*

The six forests are linked by a large expanse of open hill ground, most of which is in Scotland's National Forests and Land (NFL). A strategic approach has been adopted to address the many issues in common and the various factors that impact across the entire land holding. The Strategic Plan provides overview and direction for the separate Land Management Plans (LMPs) for the individual forest blocks – these are at different stages of approval and implementation (*timetable is presented in Appendix 3*). These Plans are supported by an Open Habitat Management Plan that will assist the co-ordinated management of the extensive open ground that links the blocks. The Strategic Plan and its accompanying Open Habitat Management Plan are not part of the statutory process, so open land will also be included in the LMPs for each forest, focusing most on elements where forestry impacts on the open ground, such as forest edge treatments and woodland expansion.

The entire Strategic Plan area lies within Scotland's rainforest zone and protection, promotion and expansion of native woodland is a key theme throughout the Plan area.

The Open Habitat Management Plan (*Appendices 11-14*) identifies areas that are suitable for woodland expansion and areas of priority open habitat of high ecological or environmental value, where the aim will be maintenance of favourable condition or restoration, where required. The various plans are also underpinned by a Deer Management Plan (DMP) (*Appendix 10*) that outlines the action that will be taken to reduce deer grazing and browsing pressure on growing trees. The DMP will be reviewed again should more resources become available and at least at years four, seven and 10, taking into consideration wider issues relating to deer management across the whole of West Region.

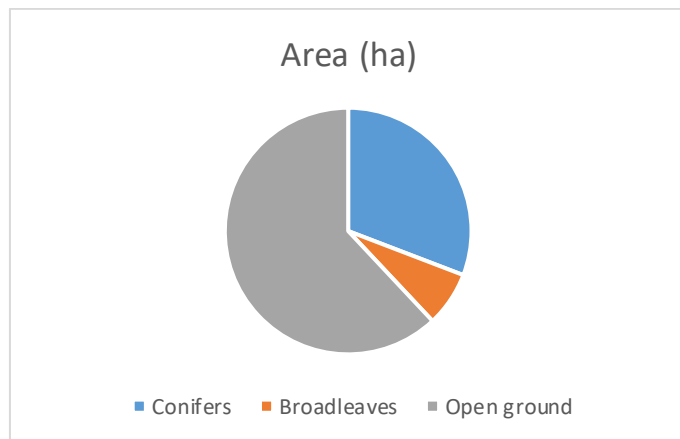
2. Summary

The Strategic Plan area is characterised by mountain and coastal landscapes of national and international significance. The mountainous terrain supports a range of designated habitats and species with areas of high ecological and heritage value - but it presents challenges to safe and sustainable forestry operations. There are difficult ground conditions, many steep unstable slopes and a number of deep gullies and fast flowing watercourses that drain directly into coastal waters. Key objectives include continuity of sustainable timber production; restoration of PAWS sites; development of broadleaved riparian habitat; protection of ASNW and native woodland expansion in suitable areas - but success is dependent on reducing grazing and browsing pressure from deer and livestock ingress. A strategic deer fence limits deer migration into the area and aids culling activity but currently, successful establishment of both broadleaves and conifers is being

North Argyll – Strategic Plan 2023 – 2033

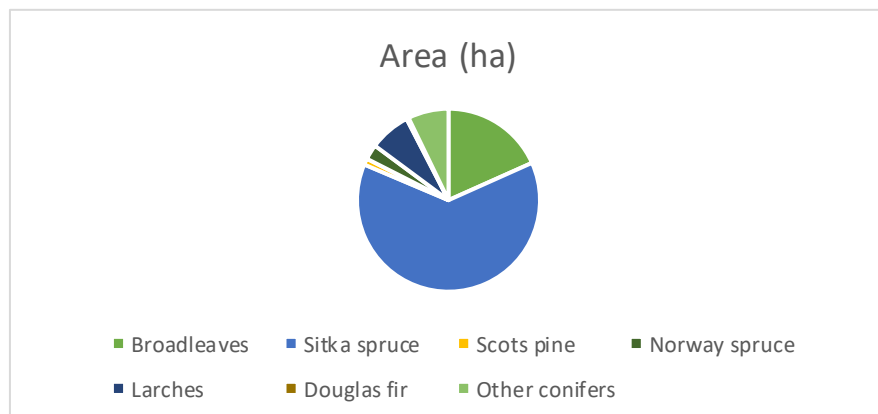
compromised by deer damage. Rhododendron and other Non-Native Invasive Species (INNS) - notably Himalayan honeysuckle - are spreading in various locations and are impacting on commercial forestry, native woodland and priority habitats.

More than 62% of the land holding is open ground (mostly hill ground) in contrast to Scotland's National Forest and Land estate as a whole, which comprises 33% open ground:



This open land links the forests and includes various open priority habitats, including calcareous grassland, wet flushes, bog pools and blanket bog.

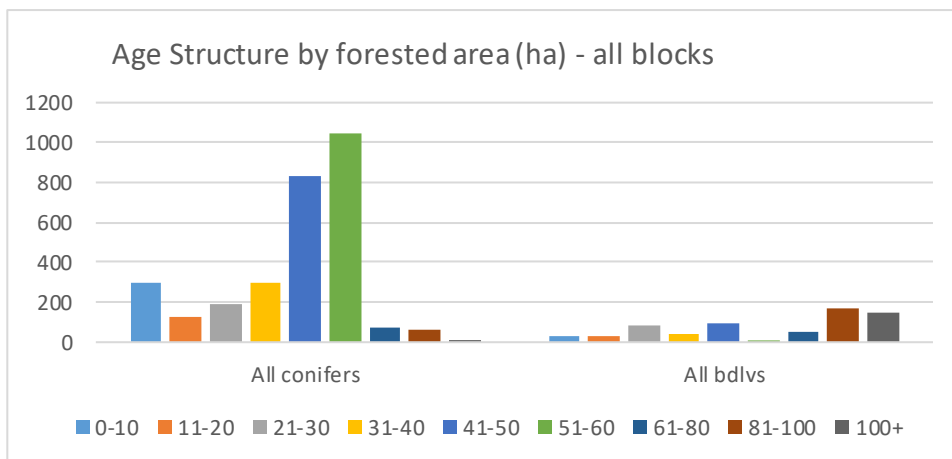
Of the forested ground, 81% is under conifers - predominantly Sitka Spruce - and 19% is under broadleaves:



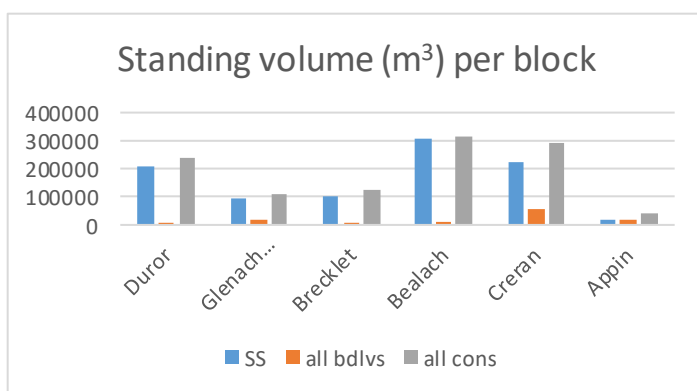
Average Yield Classes (all conifers) are 13 -14 but there is significant variation across the area and within forests. Around 21% of the conifer area is YC 20 or above, while 25% is YC 8 or below.

The 40 – 60 year age classes predominate, so addressing diversity in terms of age structure, as well as species, will be a priority - although this will be achieved over a long time period.

North Argyll – Strategic Plan 2023 – 2033



Current standing volume across all forests is 1.28M m³, dominated by conifers (1.16M m³) and by the larger forests. But the current potential volume production per hectare indicates that the smaller forests are potentially very productive, possibly due to better growing conditions and because conifer production is focused on the better ground in these forests. *Further information is provided in Appendix 2.*



	All conifers m ³ /ha *	SS m ³ /ha*
Duror	353	355
Glenachulish	334	363
Brecklet	522	557
Bealach	472	548
Creran	475	539
Appin	489	517

*volumes presented are based on 2019 figures

The area is covered by a large number of international and UK designations, associated with both large land expanses and with specific sites. The Glen Etive and Glen Fyne SPA is common to all forests apart from Appin, as this covers virtually all of the open ground that links the forests, most of which is in the NFL estate. Other geographically large-scale designations are the Ben Nevis and Glencoe National Scenic Area (NSA), which includes Brecklet, Glenachulish and part of Creran forests; the Lynn of Lorn NSA (the NE boundary of which is adjacent to Appin forest) and the Loch Etive Mountains Wild Land, which includes part of the hill ground above the Creran forest. Within these areas, various priority habitats and features may potentially be affected by forestry operations.

About 8% of the area is under native tree species. There are significant areas of PAWS, for which FLS has an obligation to restore 85%, the largest areas being at Glenachulish (301 ha) Appin (183 ha) and Duror (100 ha). Approx. 119 ha between and above the two SSSI areas at Creran will also convert to native broadleaved woodland. Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) particularly Rhododendron, present management challenges in most of the forests to varying degrees. Priorities will be to protect native woodland and priority habitats and to prevent establishment of invasives into clear felled and young establishing coupes. Statutory Plant Health Notices have been issued in some of the forests for P.

ramorum, often on Rhododendron. Plans are underway to fell larch proactively or to improve access in the event of felling at short notice.

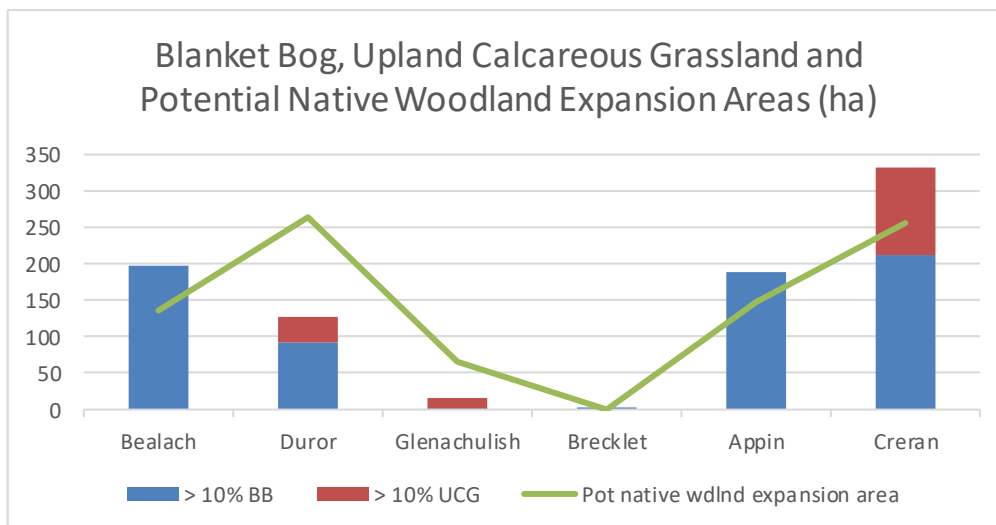
Five of the forests are associated with rivers that support Salmonids and drain into coastal waters of national importance, including Loch Creran, which is a designated marine SAC. Forestry activities must avoid any potential negative impacts on drainage, water quality or on qualifying features. SEPA flood maps indicate a potential flood risk on the River Laroch at Ballachulish and a lesser risk on the Abhain Greadhain close to the Ballachulish Bridge. Forest management planning will take account of catchment sensitivity and the potential impact of forest operations, to help mitigate risks.

Approximately 2,000 people reside in, and adjacent to, the NFL forests in this vicinity and the populations swell in summer with resident and transient tourists drawn along the road corridors, which also link the forests. Visual amenity is particularly important for the forests that lie close to these arteries, i.e. Brecklet, Glenachulish, Appin and part of Duror forest (Lagnaha) although the forests are also highly visible from the high slopes and mountain tops, which includes two Munros. Many of the forests have relatively high levels of recreational use, particularly walking and mountain/ trail biking and there has been a growing trend for camping and camper vans parked within and around the forests, which can put pressure on sensitive habitats - including riparian zones. The North Argyll forests have experienced fewer problems compared to more iconic sites but nonetheless, visitor use is growing and careful preparation and adequate resources will be required to address this issue and limit potential impacts on the forests, on sensitive habitats and on local communities. FLS will work with communities and stakeholders to maintain public access through the forests; details are covered in the LMP for each forest block.

Priority open habitats have been surveyed and their presence expressed as percentage cover in each polygon surveyed – *see Maps 6 a - g*. Blanket bog is present in 2,055 ha and upland calcareous grassland is present in 1,004 ha across the North Argyll forest area to varying degrees, most commonly present in a mosaic of other habitat types. Most of the area covered by these two habitat types lies on the open hill ground, outwith the forested areas.

Areas potentially available for native woodland expansion have been identified. These vary between blocks, depending on the total amount of open ground and proximity to existing native woodland seed sources. Where possible, these woodland creation areas will be linked to existing native woodland habitat and PAWS, through development of riparian broadleaved woodland and other broadleaved corridors.

Further information is provided in Appendices 6, 7 and 11 - 14.



The separate LMPs are statutory plans. These will direct the management of each forest, guided by the vision and overview provided by this Strategic Plan, which in turn, sits within the framework of Regional and National priorities and strategies. Priorities for the North Argyll forests include focusing productive forestry in the most appropriate sites; improving forest resilience; promoting broadleaves in riparian zones and woodland edge habitats; delivering a coherent PAWS restoration programme; expanding native woodland in identified areas. Also, controlling INNS and deer/livestock browsing pressure, to facilitate the successful establishment of young trees and to protect priority habitats. Forest management will continue to support and promote visitor access but more engagement is needed with stakeholders and user groups, to accommodate changing use and activity within these working forests.

3. Achieving national priorities locally

The management of Scotland’s National Forests and Land is guided by Scotland’s Forestry Strategy 2019 – 2029 and the organisation’s Corporate Plan and is informed by strategies on a range of topics, including land use, economy, climate change, biodiversity and the historic environment.

Scotland’s Forestry Strategy sets out a 50 year vision:

“In 2070, Scotland will have more forests and woodland, sustainably managed and better integrated with other land uses. These will provide a more resilient adaptable resource with greater natural capital value that supports a strong economy, a thriving environment and healthy and flourishing communities.”

To support the 50 year vision, the Scottish Government has identified three objectives to deliver over the next 10 years:

- Increase the contribution of forests and woodland to Scotland’s sustainable and inclusive economic growth
- Improve the resilience of Scotland’s forests and woodland and increase their contribution to a healthy and high quality environment

North Argyll – Strategic Plan 2023 – 2033

- Increase the use of Scotland’s forest and woodland resources to enable more people to improve their health, wellbeing and life chances

This strategic plan will help deliver on these objectives, in line with FLS corporate outcomes, to ensure clear linkages through the planning framework and implementation of national and regional priorities.

The brief is also guided by the National Spatial Overview, which has identified the broad focus of effort and investment challenges for this area. Key contributions that Brecklet, Glenachulish, Duror, Bealach, Appin and Creran forests make to our Priorities, Aims and Objectives are:

- Ecosystem services and additional public benefits – scenic quality and visitor attractions contribute to tourism income; sustainable timber production
- Other national commitments – PAWS restoration; rhododendron control; protection and promotion of Scotland’s rainforest; a number of partnership projects contribute to land management, including habitat management for chequered skipper butterfly; the management of red squirrel habitat and dealing with the potential impact of *P ramorum* on larch
- Contribution to financial sustainability – range of softwood; hydro schemes

The focus of effort and investment challenges identified for this area include:

- Addressing difficult coupes, such as steep and unstable slopes, challenging topography and ground conditions, gullies, wet ground, areas adjacent to/surrounded by priority habitat etc. to achieve financially and logistically efficient woodland management that respects landscape, environmental and recreational sensitivities and the availability of a suitable skilled contractor base
- Birch/native woodland management to develop markets and maximise productive capacity from broadleaved woodlands
- Native woodland restoration; restoration of PAWS sites
- Woodland expansion opportunities, extending native woodland cover to the natural tree line by natural colonisation and expanding commercially productive woodland, where feasible
- Working with neighbours and other partners to control deer grazing and browsing pressure, to improve open habitats and protect restocking (planting and natural regeneration)
- Management of riparian areas to protect watercourses; develop open canopied riparian broadleaved woodland and managing operations in a way that minimises negative impacts in catchments that are vulnerable to acidification or flooding
- Efficient future timber production
- Management of open habitat
- Control of Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) and Non-Native Regeneration (NNR)

4. Vision for the North Argyll forest area and our focus of effort and investment

The vision is for well managed land that meets society’s long term needs for sustainable timber production and natural capital and protects designated and important habitats and species. Efficient production of timber will maintain and where possible increase, volume output into the future, generating income that helps sustain the ongoing management of FLS land. But production of timber and other commercial products will be focused in areas most suitable for commercial species, avoiding difficult steep and unstable slopes; difficult to access areas; less cost effective, sensitive or fragile sites and areas of higher ecological value. Natural capital will be maximised and ecosystem services recognised, protecting riparian zones and priority open habitats; maintaining continuity of woodland cover wherever possible; expanding native woodland and maintaining designated habitats and species in favourable condition. This thinking is described by zones representing different management priorities – *presented in Map 8*. Within each zone, the focus will be on the main management priority but other priorities may also be delivered alongside, to a lesser degree. *More information on Strategic Priorities is provided in Appendix 4, with Analysis in Appendix 5.*

5. Strategic objectives

- I. Achieve a sustainable long-term supply of timber by focusing commercial conifer production on appropriate sites, avoiding steep unstable slopes and difficult working areas to ensure that future production remains cost effective and safe
- II. Improve forest resilience and manage tree health through species choices for a changing climate; by increasing species and structural diversity; by improving windfirm coupe design; by controlling INNS and through proactive early removal of larch where appropriate
- III. Increase the proportion of broadleaves and native conifers grown across the area by strengthening broadleaves in riparian zones and woodland edge habitat; by creating native woodland corridors where possible; by producing productive broadleaves and native conifers on appropriate sites and by delivering a sustainable PAWS restoration programme that promotes the ecological status of PAWS sites
- IV. Expand the area of native woodland habitat by 800 ha across the area, while protecting priority open habitat and dependent species
- V. Reduce deer and livestock browsing pressure to a level consistent with successful establishment of young planted and naturally regenerating trees
- VI. Manage LMP design and management operations to protect water habitats and catchments through management of riparian zones; design of felling and restock coupes; management of drainage systems and timing / management of felling and restocking
- VII. Maintain and where possible, improve visitor access through maintaining long distance routes where these pass through the forest and by working with local user groups / stakeholders to develop and maintain walking and bike trails and ensure compatibility with essential forestry operations

6. Key management priorities

- a) Focus greatest production effort for commercial conifers in Duror, Bealach and the upper part of Creran and in parts of Brecklet and Appin. In most of Appin forest, the short term objective will be to manage the existing advance regeneration as mixed woodland. In time, the most desirable species will be favoured and PAWS areas restored. In all forests, the aim will be to diversify tree species as much as possible
- b) Continue to deliver a programme of PAWS restoration in each LMP area, with initial priorities being restoration of the most ecologically rich areas in Glenachulish and the felling of coupes linking the SSSI areas in Creran, restocking with native broadleaves (primarily by natural regeneration but with some planting of local provenance native species where seed sources are insufficient)
- c) Deliver native woodland expansion projects covering more than 800 ha across Creran, Appin, Bealach, Duror and Glenachulish LMP areas
Surveys and analysis by the FLS Environment team have identified 867 ha of open ground across the linked North Argyll forest blocks where there is potential for native woodland expansion. These areas avoid high priority open habitats such as blanket bog and upland calcareous grassland and take into consideration site conditions, proximity to existing native woodland and adjacent commercial forestry priorities. *See maps 6 a - g and Appendices 11 – 14 for report on Open Habitats and Woodland Expansion Potential*
- d) Reduce grazing / browsing pressure from deer and livestock, to enable successful establishment of young trees (planted and natural regeneration). A combination of deer culling, livestock fencing and limited use of internal enclosure deer fencing will be required, together with maintenance, eventual replacement and possible extension, of the existing strategic deer fence. This is essential for PAWS restoration and native woodland expansion but also for establishment of commercial conifers because even Sitka spruce restock is being heavily impacted by deer in places. ***This is a business critical priority.*** *See Appendix 10 - Deer Management Plan*
- e) Plan and deliver a programme to safely fell and restock steep and unstable slopes, establishing restock (primarily native broadleaves) in these areas at the earliest opportunity
- f) Establish open canopied broadleaved woodland along riparian zones and woodland edges, linking with areas of existing native woodland, proposed woodland expansion and PAWS restoration areas. Eventually, to create continuous native woodland habitat linking from Glenachulish to Appin
- g) Control INNS and initiate landscape-scale eradication / control projects with neighbours, communities and other organisations where applicable
- h) Liaise with communities and user groups to ensure that forest use is compatible with essential management operations and to accommodate the growing and changing use of the linked forest area by locals and visitors