

Morvern Land Management Plan

Summary of Proposals

Morvern forest Land Management Plan (LMP) area extends over 5,883 ha and lies at the north-western end of the Morvern peninsular. The forest stretches from the shoreline to 410 m above sea level and comprises three adjacent forestry blocks - Barr, Lochaline North & Lochaline South – which are similar in general character. The current LMP (approved in 2013) expired in early 2024.

The impact of the plant disease *Phytophthora ramorum* has been significant across all the forest blocks and extensive felling in response to disease outbreaks and Statutory Plant Health Notices (SPHN) have been Issued. This has led to an accelerated felling programme not envisaged when the previous LMP was drawn up.

Barr is the most northerly forest within the LMP area and is adjacent to extensive areas of Atlantic Oakwood that lie along Loch Sunart, many of which are former areas of intensely worked Oak coppice. These neighbouring woods have high ecological value and the area (most of which lies just North of the FLS march boundary) is designated as both a Site of Special Scientific Interest (Sunart SSSI) and a Special Area of Conservation (Morvern Woods SAC).

Within the FLS forest, there are areas of existing mature native broadleaves (NBL) the main sites being associated with burns and gullies. Areas of planted and naturally regenerating NBL have also established well in places. The soils are often excellent for both timber production and rapid carbon capture and the site is well roaded.

Barr is secluded, with a lower footfall than in the other forests within the LMP, but it lies within an area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV) that encompasses Loch Sunart to the North. The Otter Path provides a route out to the North end of the forest and the “Strava” heatmap indicates that the Otter Path is used as an element of the coastal loop that links with Drimnin to the West on the Sound of Mull. An old Public Right of Way (PROW) also follows the Barr river and links with Bunavullin in the West. This path is only lightly used but in the past was an important communication link on the peninsula. The tidal race at the entrance to Loch Teacuis, the shoreline woodland cover and the solitude make this area a perfect habitat for Otter. Pine marten are also abundant in the forest.

Lochaline North forest lies on the south-eastern side of the LMP area and is characterised by high ground, a sweeping line of steep cliffs and sheltered corries. The soils are variable, with a mix of fertile brown earths and areas of poorer peaty rankers that are unsuitable for productive forestry. The terrain provides a sheltered environment from the prevailing westerlies, however severe gales can produce destructive vortices when the wind crosses the cliff line. The aspect and landform create a shaded site which reduces the growing season and consequently growth rates. The area is well roaded with some areas of steep ground constraining harvesting and management options. The old Township at Loch Doire nan Mart is a Scheduled Monument and is served by a path linking it to a car park. The Township area is lightly grazed by ponies under an agricultural grazing let. The cliff line supports a variety of interesting flora and provides nesting sites for a wide range of iconic birds. The area has a high visual impact in places, for travellers heading West into Lochaline on the A884.

Lochaline South is the largest forest block within the LMP and comprises extensive areas of productive Sitka spruce, a rainforest species from the Pacific Coast of North America that is

ideally suited to the West Coast of Scotland. There are more limited areas of mature NBL and small areas of Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) associated with burns. Located close to Lochaline, the forest is well used - mainly by residents. The number of circular paths is limited and some of these options have been blocked by windblow. Large areas have been felled under SPHNs. The area has a high landscape impact when viewed from Mull and from boat traffic through the Sound of Mull, although the gently rolling terrain reduces visibility and negative or positive impacts from coupe design. The NBL along the burns provides forest continuity in landscape terms and anchors the forest visually to the broadleaves running along the coastline.

The high volume of quality timber produced from the LMP area and its importance as a sustainable strategic timber resource mean that growing commercial conifer crops remains a key priority in Morvern. The internal road network is well established and there are haulage links by both road and sea. The fast growth of Sitka spruce over a large area also contributes to a high rate of carbon capture across the forest.

Clear felling remains the main management system due to growing and climatic conditions but limited areas have been identified for Continuous Cover Forestry, where thinning may be feasible. Felling in recent years has been driven by the large numbers of Statutory Plant Health Notices (SPHN) issued in response to *P. ramorum* infection on larch. This has set a framework for the revised coupe design, which has considered the felling completed to date; the potential for future *P. ramorum* infections and the need to lengthen rotations in non-larch stands where feasible, to even-out timber supply. Where appropriate, Long Term Retentions are used to help maintain structural diversity. Additional roading has been considered, where this is required to facilitate larch removal.

PAWS restoration and the development of NBLs along riparian corridors also remain key objectives, with the ambition to link to NBL on neighbouring ground and expand NBL along forest margins, where this is possible. Private Water Supplies and water catchments and ecosystems have been identified and will be buffered and protected in the forest design and during forestry operations.

Areas of deep peat suitable for restoration have been identified and elsewhere, peatland edge habitat will be developed on areas where low Yield Classes are anticipated, which are unsuitable for restocking with commercial crops.

The current forest structure and the need to work to windfirm edges has limited the opportunities for landscape improvement, although felling and restocking coupes have been designed to best fit the landform as far as possible.

The maintenance of a deer-proof fence along the march boundary and effective deer control across the LMP area are essential for the successful establishment of young planted and naturally regenerating trees. Recruitment of NBLs in PAWS and riparian zones and the development of alternative conifer species are particularly dependent on low browsing pressure.

The LMP presents felling and replanting proposals for the first ten years (2024 to 2034) in detail. Forest road and track formation during this period are also detailed. The first ten years are important because this relates to the parts of the Plan that seek approval for specific forestry operations.

Objectives

1. Maintain production potential of the forest, optimising the flow of conifer sawlog timber and managing suitable areas for broadleaved wood production. Use the intrinsic features and scale of the forest to maintain a critical mass of highly productive conifer timber production
2. Protect ASNW and restore high ecological potential PAWS areas to native woodland, to create landscape and ecological resilience. Strengthen native broadleaves in riparian zones and develop a network of native broadleaved woodland that will eventually extend through Morvern and strengthen the Atlantic oakwoods linked to the Sunart SSSI and SAC
3. Continue to fell larch to reduce the risk of P.ramorum spread, in line with the FLS Larch Strategy, through the development of a coherent harvesting programme that incorporates the previous and ongoing larch removal
4. Implement timely thinning and manage LISS / CCF where feasible and compatible with required larch removal
5. Build resilience by improving diversity of tree species and age categories, increasing the proportion of alternative conifers, as well as native broadleaves. Expand the area of productive broadleaves by bringing more broadleaved areas into management and by establishing new productive broadleaved areas
6. Improve visual amenity and landscape impact of the woodland, with a particular focus on the views from Mull and the ferries sailing through the Sound of Mull, as well as from the approach along the A884 from the North
7. Work with neighbours and partners to reduce grazing/browsing pressure from deer and livestock, to protect planted and naturally regenerating trees and to maintain priority open ground habitats in favourable condition
8. Design and manage the forest to deliver sustainable carbon management (adaptation, reduction, capture) throughout the rotation, while balancing productivity with resilience; for example, via minimum-intervention areas; the use of fast growing commercial species and the management of CCF on appropriate sites
9. Recognise the importance of public access and the involvement of the community in developing the future forest design and be open to exploring options that will realise community benefits
10. Continue to work with Saving Morvern's Rainforest Project in support of its objectives, notably Rhododendron control and the management of the Atlantic oakwood designated features
11. Review areas of low YC and wet soils and where peat may be present in discrete areas or in mosaics; restore large areas of deep peat
12. Identify Private and Public water supplies and plan for the protection of water supply sources within the forest