

# Easter Ross 2023 Revision

## Land Management Plan Brief

### Introduction

This brief gives an outline for the Land Management Plan (LMP) revision of the Easter Ross 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 and Viewpoints**

**Map 2 – Key Features**

**Map 3 – Management Coupes (to be revised)**

**Map 4 – Future Habitats and Species (to be revised)**

**Map 5 – Issues and Opportunities - Scoping**

### 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 demonstrated spatially 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 Easter Ross 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 but FLS is welcoming comments or ideas. These will be processed alongside the LMP revision and where necessary might influence one another.

## 2. Background

The Forests of the Easter Ross LMP are situated on the east coast of Scotland between the Cromarty and Dornoch Firth's. The main block is contiguous and contains Strathroy, Tain Hill, Morangie, Lamington and Cnoc Navie. The plan area also contains several smaller blocks known as Struie, Dounie, Morrigh More and Pitmaduthy (**Map 1 – Location and Viewpoints**).

The Easter Ross LMP area covers a total of 6900ha of which approximately 4772.7ha (69%) is productive forest, 56.8ha (1%) is windblown and 6ha (<1%) is seed stands and research plots of planted origin. The majority of the remaining area Ha is land currently felled in fallow (453.7ha – 7%), internal open space (1369.1ha – 20%) and unplantable land (53.7ha – 1%) (see figure 1)

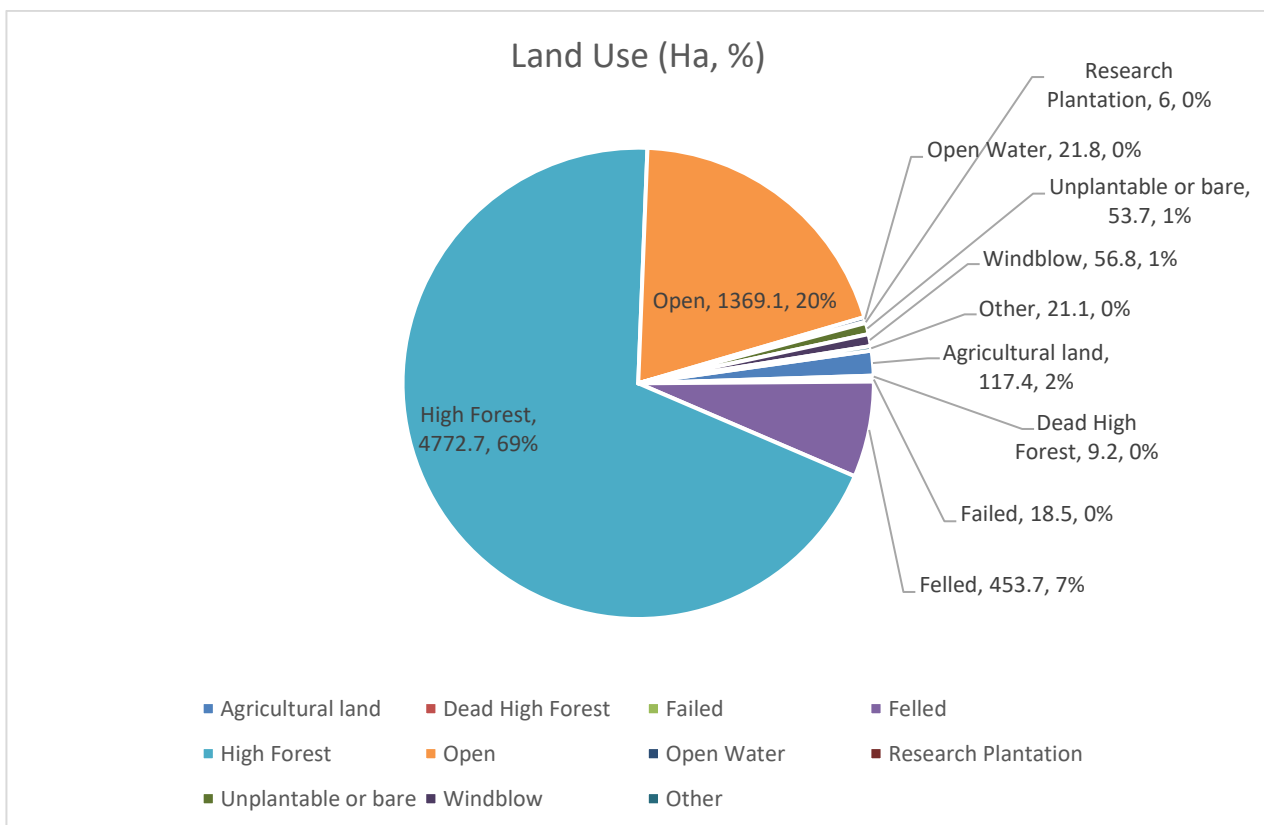


Figure 1: Current land use in the Easter Ross LMP Area

There is a long history of forestry and tree cover in the Easter Ross area 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 these. Particularly Tain Hill, Lamington and Inchindown have a history of tree cover whilst Strathroy has been planted up more recently.

The Easter Ross forests contain a variety of different soils and fertility ranges. The lower lying and steeper areas generally contain a mix of gley's and ironpans. Flatter areas at higher elevations such as at Strathroy-West predominantly consist of blanket bog. A common theme is the low fertility and poor drainage of these soils. The species choice reflects the soil composition in the area and consists largely of pine species, which are able to cope with the low fertility, and Sitka spruce, a species that can cope with an extremely wide range of site conditions. There are

several areas with better drainage and fertility allowing for a wider choice in species. The current species composition is shown in figure 2 below.

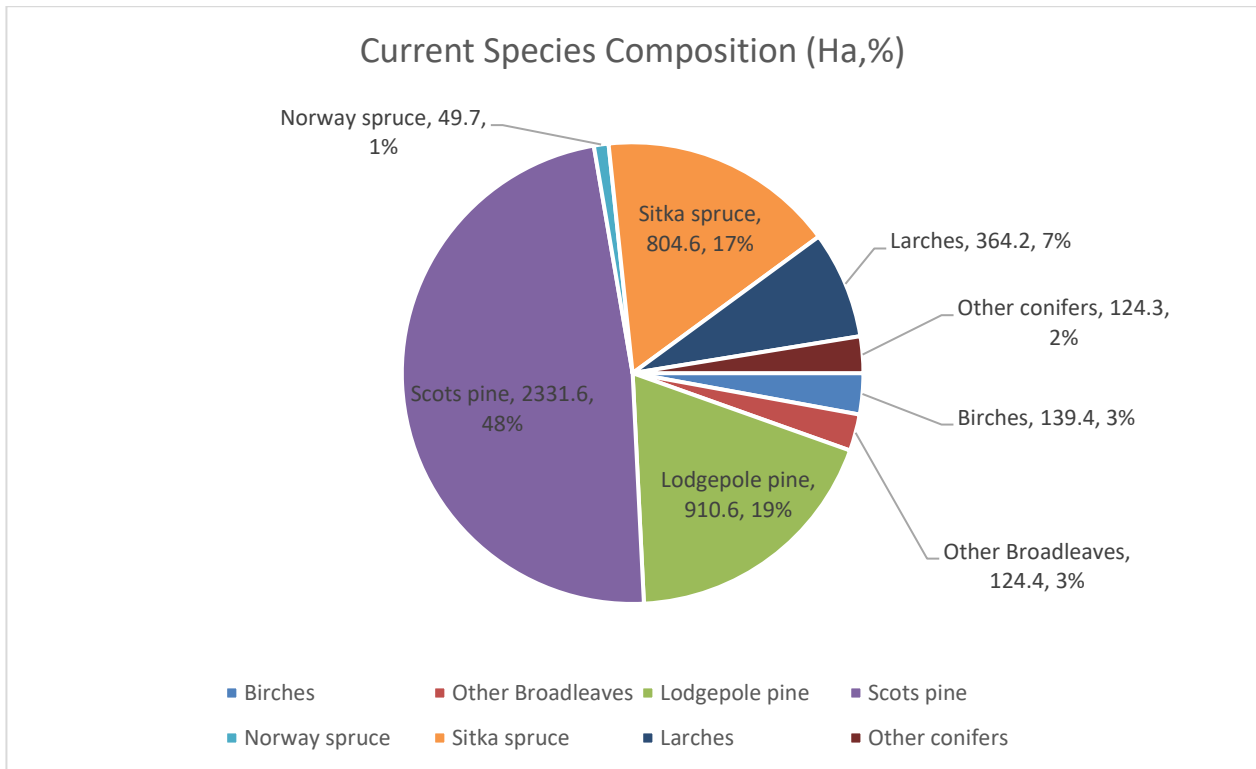


Figure 2: Current Species Composition in percentage of the forested land in the Easter Ross LMP Area

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 30-40 years range which reflects the planting at Strathroy. The large proportion of 60-80 is due to the older planting at Morange and Lamington.

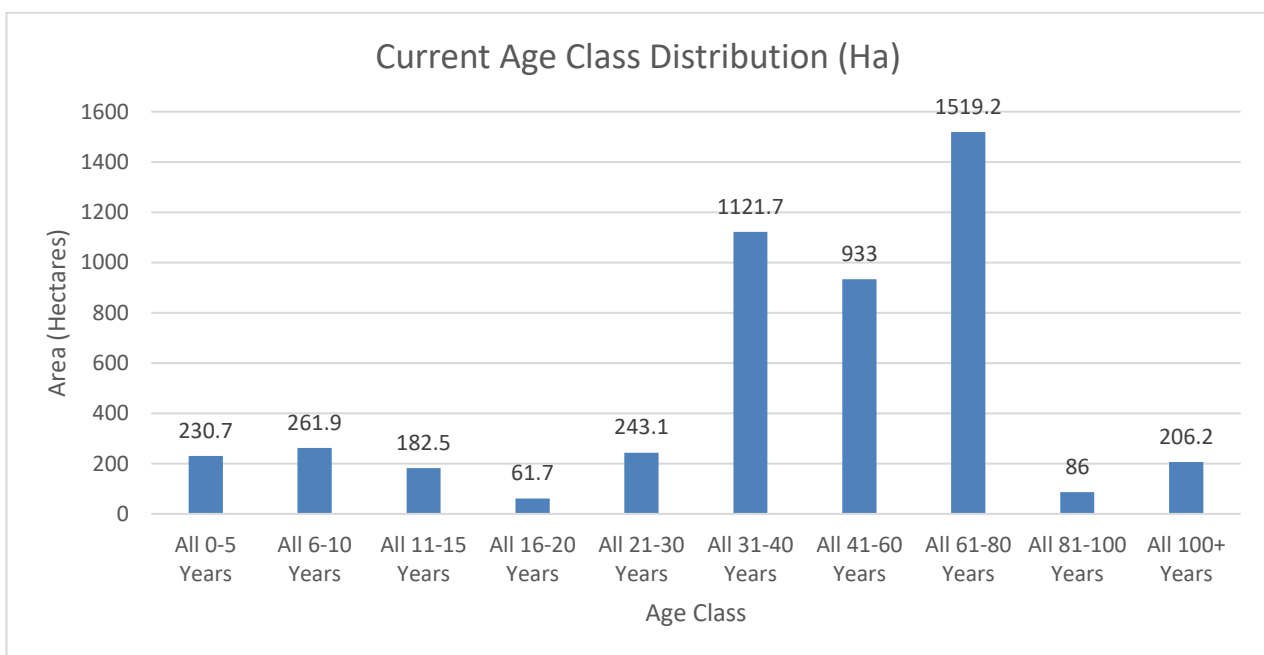


Figure 3: Age distribution per hectare for forested land in the Easter Ross LMP area

The forests and lands managed by FLS in the Easter Ross area are actively used by a large variety of users. Most of the recreation is done by local communities as the forests are accessible to towns and villages. Most usage takes place in and around Aldie Burn, a great facility with several walks in the area. Informal use of forest roads, core paths and roaming under SOAC is common and encouraged by FLS. Since Covid there's been a 'Stay-the-Night' carpark at Strathrory which has been a successful facility for short-term campervans/caravan stays.

The following designated sites are in or in the sphere of influence of the Easter Ross LMP area:

<i>Struie Channels SSSI</i>	<i>Pitmaduthy Moss SSSI/SAC</i>
<i>Morangie Forest SPA</i>	<i>Cromarty Firth SPA/SSSI/Ramsar</i>
<i>Kinrive – Strathrory SSSI</i>	<i>Morrish More SSSI</i>
<i>Craigroy Burn SSSI</i>	<i>Dornoch Firth and Loch Fleet SPA</i>
<i>Easter Fearn SSSI</i>	<i>Dornoch Firth and Morrish More SAC</i>
<i>Loch Achnacloich SAC/SSSI</i>	<i>Moray Firth SPA/SAC</i>
<i>Novar SPA</i>	<i>Alness River Valley SSSI</i>

A section of the Easter Ross LMP area is furthermore designated as a *Red Squirrel Stronghold*

In addition there are 13 Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the Easter Ross LMP area:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Grid Reference</b>
<b>CARN LIATH</b>	LONG CAIRN	NH729798
<b>EDDERTON HILL</b>	LONG CAIRN	NH734834
<b>RED BURN, CAIRN</b>	CHAMBERED CAIRN	NH727834
<b>CREAG AN FHITHICH</b>	FORT	NH684867
<b>WESTER LAMINGTON</b>	LONG CAIRN	NH747780
<b>CARN A' CHAIT</b>	CAIRN	NH716805
<b>GLEN OF SCOTSBURN</b>	FIELD SYSTEM, HUT CIRCLE(S)	NH731786
<b>GLEN OF SCOTSBURN</b>	ENCLOSURE(S)	NH728784
<b>SCOTSBURN WOOD WEST CAIRN &amp; SCOTSBURN WOOD EAST CAIRN &amp; SUBSITE OF: SCOTSBURN WOOD</b>	CAIRN(S), CHAMBERED CAIRN(S)	NH721768
<b>SCOTSBURN WOOD CAIRN 3 &amp; SUBSITE OF: SCOTSBURN WOOD</b>	CAIRN(S), CHAMBERED CAIRN(S)	NH728767
<b>SCOTSBURN WOOD CAIRN 2 &amp; SCOTSBURN WOOD EAST CAIRN &amp; SUBSITE OF: SCOTSBURN WOOD</b>	CAIRN(S), CHAMBERED CAIRN(S)	NH730765
<b>SCOTSBURN WOOD EAST CAIRN &amp; SCOTSBURN WOOD CAIRN 1 &amp; SUBSITE OF: SCOTSBURN WOOD</b>	CAIRN(S), CHAMBERED CAIRN(S)	NH730764
<b>CARN NA CROICHE</b>	CHAMBERED CAIRN	NH656722

## 3. Draft Vision

### 10 Year vision

*The main objectives of the Easter Ross 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 and safeguarding of biodiversity will form an even more important element of the new plan.*

*The critical success factors of the Easter Ross land management plan in the next 10 years will be mainly around preserving and improving the Capercaillie SPA, peatland restoration and forest regeneration.*

*In 10 years' time the ecosystem services provided by the forests and land FLS manage in the Easter Ross LMP area will have improved. Several areas of low yielding plantation on deep peats will be restored to functioning bogs and thereby capturing carbon from the atmosphere.*

*To improve the resilience of the forests in light of climate change the regeneration of mature woodlands at Morangie and Inchindown will have started. This will be done using natural regeneration where possible to maximise environmental benefits and minimise costs. The small scale restocks or areas of natural regeneration will diversify the available habitat for Capercaillie and provide foodsource and shelter.*

*Where possible a larger variety of species will be used to further improve the resilience of the forest. Along watercourses riparian areas will be establishing to form a network of native, low-density and mostly broadleaved woodland which will improve the aquatic and terrestrial habitats.*

*The recreational facilities in the LMP area will be maintained and improved. Where possible FLS will work with the local community to improve facilities and facilitate events. The diversification of the forest and the thoroughly considered felling sequences will improve recreational and landscape value.*

### 50 Year vision

*The quality of the forests and lands within the Easter Ross LMP area will have improved significantly in 50 years' time.*

*The forests will have a more natural age class distribution resulting in a larger variety of habitats of which important species such as Capercaillie and red squirrel are profiting. An increased availability of deadwood will have safeguarded the large amount of biodiversity associated with this. Areas of PAWS will be restored entirely or almost entirely to native species thereby creating large scale, resilient, native habitats. Throughout the LMP area a network of riparian woodland is now thriving providing essential habitat for species such as salmon and trout.*

*Previously afforested land on deep peats will be restored to open habitat where appropriate. These bogs will be actively sequestering carbon and provide habitat for open habitat species such as Dunlin and Golden Plover.*

*The Easter Ross LMP area will keep providing an important source of timber for the local markets. The slow grown Scots pine will be thinned to result in high quality sawlog which will form an important resource for the construction industry. Faster growing conifer species will be managed similarly and will provide large quantities of prime product. Where possible broadleaved stands will be managed to improve the timber quality and allow for diverse use of these products in the future. Lower quality crops and thinned volume will form the basis for fencing, slats, woodchip and biofuels.*

*The forests of Easter Ross will be actively used by the local communities for recreation. Walking, mountain biking, horse riding and other forms of recreation will be commonplace. The local highlights such as the Aldie Burn and Tain Hill will attract locals as well as people from further away. Local communities are benefitting from cooperative initiatives where the forests are used for education, recreation and food.*

## 4. Key Issues and Opportunities

During the internal scoping a variety of issues and objectives have been identified. These are shown spatially on **Map 5 – Issues and Opportunities – Scoping**. The most important ones are discussed in further detail below.

During this revision the regeneration programmes need to be upscaled. The current age distribution is poor with a large area of forest on Tain Hill, Lamington and Tarlogie consisting of mature Scots pine. This is starting to lead to reduced resilience of trees to changes in climate and resistance to fungal infections such as *Peridermium pini*. The increased maturity is also resulting in a reduced productivity of the pine crops and a reduced response to thinning. Because of the light demand of Scots pine (and larch) and the poor stability of the crops the best option for regeneration will need careful consideration. Larch is currently threatened by *Phytophthora ramorum* in the west of the country leading to action in most of the National Forests and Land. In Easter Ross larch will be retained and used as it mostly falls within the ‘Priority Action Zone – Less Vulnerable Zone’ for *Phytophthora ramorum* meaning rapid response to outbreaks is necessary but increased removal not currently planned.

There’s significant infection of *Peridermium pini* in particular at Edderton Hill. *Dothistroma Needle Blight* seems to have impacted mainly the lodgepole pine at Strathroy-West and some Scots pine at Strathroy.

There’s currently no access into most of the Strathroy-West block which will need to be planned and built in the coming decade to allow for tree removal and peatland restoration.

Close liaison with statutory stakeholders will be essential to ensure management within and around the Capercaillie SPA will benefit this species. NatureScot and RSPB will need to be contacted and proposed management discussed.

## 5. Time Frame

<b>What</b>	<b>When</b>
<b>Scoping</b>	March/April 2023
<b>Draft Plan Completion</b>	July 2023
<b>Consultation</b>	August/September 2023
<b>Review Draft</b>	October 2023
<b>Internal Review</b>	November 2023
<b>Submission</b>	December 2023