

Section 5 Special Conservation Measures

Funding is available to carry out work to ensure the conservation interest of habitats.

Control of bracken

Regeneration of heather

1. Control of bracken

Bracken is a very invasive weed on agricultural land and can be damaging to the conservation interest of farm habitats such as species-rich grassland, heather moorland, rough moorland grazing and lowland raised bogs. Bracken spreads by way of underground stems or rhizomes. Ease of access determines the methods of control and either a manual knapsack sprayer or tractor boom sprayer can be used. The method of control must be agreed in advance with DARD.



Bracken

Conditions and standards

- Use Asulam (trade name Asulox) for the control of bracken. It gives good selective control with little long-term damage to most plants except ferns.
- For dense stands, follow up treatments after the first spray treatment, will be needed to give a complete kill.
- Protective clothing must be worn during spraying operations and manufacturer's instructions followed at all times.
- Grant aid is available for the control of bracken by either manual knapsack sprayer or tractor boom sprayer.

Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs)

Written consent must be obtained from the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS), Department of the Environment before any works are carried out within an ASSI or along an ASSI boundary. It is the responsibility of the agreement holder to obtain this consent. The EHS contact telephone number for further information is (028) 9054 6595.

2. Regeneration of heather

Well-managed heather is a tremendous asset to the farm, providing a valuable grazing resource for both sheep and cattle. In addition, heather forms a distinctive component of the landscape and it is an important wildlife habitat.

Funding is available for burning or flailing blocks (approximately 0.5 hectares) of heather moorland in a planned sequence to encourage regeneration. The aim is to produce a patchwork with range of heather ages, which increases

grazing quality, encourage livestock to graze the whole area and benefits wildlife. A heather regeneration plan must be agreed with DARD, outlining the extent and location of the areas to be burnt or flailed before approval can be given.



Burning heather

Conditions and standards

Heather burning

- Burning of heather or hill pasture is controlled by law and must not be carried out between 15 April and 31 August to protect ground-nesting birds.
- Burning heather is a skilled job requiring careful supervision and sufficient labour to keep the fire under control.
- Burning must not be carried out on blanket bog, bracken, woodland and scrub, including gorse, archaeological and historic sites, heather over 30cm tall and Areas of Special Scientific Interest without the written consent of Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) Department of Environment. The EHS contact telephone number for further information is (028) 9054 6595.
- Give notice of burning - you must, by law, give notice of intent to burn to neighbours, owners or occupiers of adjacent land at least 24 hours before burning. If the burn is to take place within one mile of a state-owned forest, permission must be obtained from the local District Forest Officer.

- Suitable conditions for burning - burning must only take place in suitable weather conditions, which occur, on average, on only ten days each year. Light winds are often variable in strength and direction, which make control of the burn difficult. Always aim to burn when the breeze is blowing downhill if possible.
- Fires should be kept to around 30m wide and not allowed to spread to greater than 50m in width and can be as long as is practical. A normal burning team should consist of at least 5-6 people. It is a legal requirement to have sufficient people on hand to control a burn. A realistic target would be five burns per day each covering 0.4 - 0.8ha (1 -2 acres).
- Firebreaks must be present - these can either be natural features such as gullies, wet strips or flushes, farm tracks or rock outcrops. If no natural firebreaks exist artificial ones must be created. All firebreaks must cut across the line of the proposed fire. Firebreaks should be at least 6m and preferably 10m wide.
- It is essential to create 10m wide firebreaks around any areas of commercial forestry. These should be maintained annually by one of the following methods:
 - By burning: a fire burned against the wind so that it burns hot and slow can be used to create a firebreak.
 - By flailing: if a tractor-powered flail can gain access to the area a firebreak can be cut in the heather and the burn completed before the cut material dries out.
- Safety when burning - each member of the burning squad should have a face mask (BS2092) and a long handled beater. The latter should be 3-4m long and are best constructed from aluminium with either a flat rectangular aluminium end or a rectangle of reinforced rubber conveyor belting.
- It is essential that all fires be properly extinguished before leaving the site.

Flailing heather

- Heather flailing must not be carried out during the period 15 April to 31 August to protect ground-nesting birds.
- Flailing heather by mechanical means is an acceptable way of encouraging regeneration. Suitable machines range



Flailing heather

from a specifically designed heather swipe to old single or double chop forage harvesters.

- The technique is simple - the same planning approach as outlined for heather burning must be followed. Leave the side of the block as irregular as possible to give a more natural appearance. A layer of mulch may suppress heather regeneration and, if possible, try to spread off the cut area or place into rows.

Further advice

- Burning is the most widely used method of regenerating heather and it encourages new growth to sprout from existing heather plants;
- removes old, dead material, recycles nutrients;
- stimulates heather seed germination.

Future management after burning

If the burn has been carried out properly heather stems will regenerate both from the plant base and the underlying seed bank. These young tender shoots will invariably attract sheep and, if overgrazing results, the heather may be grazed out. This can be avoided if the burning programme is spread around the whole moor in small blocks rather than concentrating it in one large block. If the block of regenerated heather is at a risk from overgrazing, some form of temporary fencing, for example electric fencing, should be considered.

Flailing has the following advantages when compared with burning.

- Less weather dependent.
- Requires less labour and is easier to control.
- Can be used on old woody heather.
- No risk of fires getting out of control.
- Useful for creating firebreaks.

Flailing has disadvantages which include the following.

- Rate of regeneration is slower than with burning.
- Operational area is limited by terrain.
- Health and safety needs considered.
- Equipment is more expensive.

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