

Supporting guidance for Control of Scrub or Woody Vegetation

Date published: 14 September, 2023

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the [bottom of the page](#) .

Updates to last version

- added definitions of light, intermediate and heavy scrub
- added details on what area should be claimed



<https://www.youtube.com/embed/uR0wpy7e4ok>

Introduction



Scrub can provide a valuable habitat for a range of species including birds and invertebrates. However, where scrub is expanding into other habitats it can lead to a loss of important species and plant communities, both by shading out or out-competing the existing vegetation or by affecting the water table.

Scrub encroachment onto peatlands (bogs and fens) is often linked with changes in the water table due to drainage, but changes in land management practices and surface disturbance can also encourage scrub. Established trees and scrub draw water out of the peat and also intercept rainfall in the canopy, some of which is lost to the atmosphere through evaporation. This drier peat then encourages the establishment of further scrub and trees, the release of nutrients from the peat and also captures nutrients from the atmosphere.

Scrub encroachment can also be an issue on species-rich grasslands and on a range of heathland and wetland habitats.

Planning your scrub control

As part of your application, include information on your scrub control proposals including: the species and location, the extent (area and percentage cover), the nature of cover (light, intermediate, heavy), the age of the scrub (young, mature, old), the proposed methods of treatment, what you will do with the cut material and your follow-up methods.

Scrub removal work should be undertaken in the first two years of your AECS contract, to prevent continued seeding across the site.

You will need to submit a Scrub Control Plan as part of your application.



[Scrub Control Plan \(MS Word, Size: 143.4 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Scrub-Control-Plan-AECS-April-2015.docx> [Plan template]

Under certain circumstances a Scottish Forestry felling licence may be required to remove areas of woodland under peatland restoration plans. Contact your [local conservancy office](#) for advice.

[What are the definitions of light, intermediate and heavy scrub?](#)

Light scrub clearance rate

This rate will be appropriate where 50 per cent or more of the scrub or woody vegetation is less than 1.2 metres in height and a grazing understory is clearly visible. Scrub stems are typically no more than eight centimetres thick.

Intermediate scrub clearance rate

This rate will be appropriate where 50 per cent or more of the scrub or woody vegetation is more than 1.2 metres in height and there is limited grazing understory.

Heavy scrub clearance rate

This rate will be appropriate where 50 per cent or more of the scrub or woody vegetation is more than 1.2 metres in height and there is no, or very little, grazing understory. Mature gorse fits within this category.

[What area should I claim?](#)

If the scrub is contained within discrete blocks, you should claim the area covered by the total of the areas of these discrete blocks.

If the scrub is scattered in a mosaic pattern over a larger area, you should estimate how much of this area is actually covered in scrub, and only claim for that proportion.

You can use the methods within the [assessing ineligible land for land managers](#) guidance prepared for the Basic Payment Scheme, to help you estimate the relevant area.

[What needs to be done](#)

Hand pulling

Hand pulling can cause ground disturbance that encourages further germination of scrub so it is only appropriate where seedlings are small and thinly spread.

Cutting

Hand cutting and lopping may be appropriate for clearing small areas. For larger scrub control projects brush cutters and chainsaws are effective. Brush cutters can be used on scrub with a basal diameter up to five centimetres, for larger scrub a chain saw is more efficient. Stands of scrub over 1.2 metres high should generally be cut rather than sprayed as above this height there is increased risk of spray drift or operator contamination.

Cutting alone will not kill the scrub, and many species will regrow from cut stems in the following spring. To reduce the chance of regrowth cut stumps should be treated immediately with an application of 10 per cent solution of glyphosate – this is particularly important for birch. Treating immediately will allow as much herbicide to be taken up as possible, preferably within one hour. Mix this herbicide with a water-soluble dye so you can see where you've been. Apply it with a spot gun or small handheld sprayer on a solid jet setting to reduce spills and damage to the surrounding vegetation.

Cutting should be carried out between 1 August and 28 February to avoid the bird breeding season and when the sap is falling to maximise the effectiveness of stump treatment.

Cut material

On drier habitats it will be possible to extract the cut material. On sensitive wetland habitats, such as bogs and fens, it may be less damaging to fell to waste some or all of the scrub and to leave the cut material to be gradually incorporated into the bog surface. Where this is the case, felled material should be cut into one metre sections, snedded and left lying flat on the bog surface. This promotes rapid inclusion in the bog. Cut material may be used to infill ditches, using the trunks to weigh down brush.

Spraying

For small areas of scrub regrowth where cutting is not possible, spraying is an alternative. We recommend you spray in summer and only on calm days to minimise the risk. To further reduce damage to surrounding vegetation, weed wiping is preferable to spraying, but it is only effective with light birch regrowth.

Herbicide can be applied with a pneumatic sprayer or a low volume sprayer. Most woody species found on bogs can be treated with glyphosate. Formulations vary and label recommendations should be followed at all times.

Where scrub is dense and impenetrable, for example with gorse and rhododendron, cut at the base then paint the stumps or inject the cut stumps with herbicide.

Removal of cut material from the site

Where large amounts of scrub are to be cut it is preferable to remove the cut material from the site. See [Control of Scrub or Woody Vegetation – Removal from Site of Cut Vegetation](#) for further guidance.

Access routes

If using machinery on wet sites use low ground-pressure vehicles and only when weather / ground conditions are appropriate. Select routes through drier areas to minimise damage and brush to protect the ground surface.

Follow-up work

Without aftercare from either grazing stock or further chemical treatment, areas that have been cleared can regrow into dense, impenetrable scrub within a few years. It is essential that you undertake follow-up treatment to tackle any regrowth. There is a separate capital item option for [follow-up treatment](#).

Related management items

- [Lowland Bog Management](#)
- [Species-rich Grassland Management](#)
- [Wetland Management](#)

Related capital items

- [Control of Scrub – Follow-up Treatment](#)
- [Control of Scrub or Woody Vegetation – Removal from Site of Cut Vegetation](#)

Further information

- [Scottish Forestry felling permission](#)
- Detailed advice on scrub control techniques – [Scottish Natural Heritage Peatland Action Scrub Clearance guidance note \(PDF, Size: 404.3 kB\)](#)

Recent changes

Section	Change
What needs to be done	Removal of 'Flailing' text, revised text for Spraying and minor edit to Removal of cut material from the site.
Further information	Updated / renamed link covering Scottish Forestry felling permission.

Previous versions

[Previous versions of this page](#)