

Supporting guidance for Heather Restoration

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Note: In September 2023, references to Scottish Natural Heritage have been updated to NatureScot.

The extent of heather on many Scottish hills has declined markedly over the past 50 years. This is particularly the case in western Scotland, where the dominance by flying bent (*Molinia caerulea*) has suppressed heather growth and makes safe, controlled muirburning difficult.

The [Heather Restoration](#) item helps to reinstate heather cover from areas where it has been lost to benefit black grouse, other breeding birds and the wider habitat.

Which areas are suitable?

Areas for heather restoration should have held heather in living memory. They will be composed of unimproved rough grazing. Areas with heather cover that is suppressed by heavy grazing should not be treated because heather in these areas will generally re-establish given a suitable period of reduced grazing, especially over-winter (support is also available for reducing grazing levels under moorland management).

Areas treated should be accessible for suitable low ground pressure machinery, such as tractors with twin-wheels or ATVs / UTVs. On SSSIs, SPAs or SACs any treatment should be discussed with NatureScot staff at the planning stage.

Proposals for heather restoration should be part of a wider moorland management programme on the holding, and complement an appropriate grazing regime for stock and wild herbivores and any muirburn, bracken control.

What needs to be done?

First spray the existing vegetation with a glyphosate-based herbicide at the label-recommended dose using suitable spraying machinery. Spray after the bird nesting period and whilst plants are still actively growing, ideally between 10 July and 31 August, although it would still be possible to spray until 30 September in most years.

Take care to:

- ensure machinery does not rut the existing sward.
- where possible, vehicles should avoid soft, wet areas and areas of fragile exposed soils
- avoid spraying any areas of high nature conservation interest, for example, blanket bog
- spread treatment in small patches across land in preference to a few extensive blocks

Spray in accordance with [The Code of Practice for Using Plant Protection Products in Scotland](#) guidance.

Then destroy the sprayed sward either flailing or burning. Any burning should be undertaken during late August or September when the surrounding vegetation remains green, and is therefore difficult to burn. As this is outside the legal burning season, a specific licence is required from NatureScot. Your application for funding will be treated as the application for a licence. Any burning should follow the requirements of the [muirburn code](#).

Once burnt / flailed, a recognised moorland /heather seed mix should be added to ensure there is adequate viable seed immediately available for germination. We recommend you seek advice about seed rates from the seed supplier.

Grazing livestock should be removed for at least two years, and not reinstated until after the heather and other species have grown into viable and well-rooted plants. In the south of Scotland and at lower altitudes, this could be as soon as the second growing season, but will be slower in other areas. Plants should be well rooted before grazing is reintroduced or wild herbivore control is relaxed. The grazing

pressure from wild herbivores (e.g. goats, deer, hares and rabbits), should also be reduced to a minimum. Explain how you will do this in your Moorland Management Plan and show how you will monitor the impact of grazing reductions. Support is available for any necessary fencing costs.

When re-introduced, light summer grazing will help to reduce the potential dominance of grasses in the sward. We recommend grazing levels equivalent to no more than 0.15 LU/ha on dry heath and 0.06 LU/ha on wet heath & blanket bog between 1 May and 15 August. You cannot graze the treated area in the winter for the duration of the contract.

Complementary options

- [Moorland Management](#)
- [Stock Disposal](#)
- [Away Wintering of Sheep](#)
- [Muirburn and Heather Cutting](#)

Complementary capital items

- [Stock Fence](#)
- [Gate](#)
- [Enhancing or Modifying a Deer Fence](#)
- [Enhancing or Modifying a Stock Fence](#)
- [Scare and Temporary Electric Fencing](#)
- [Predator Control](#)
- [Ditch Blocking – Plastic Piling Dams](#)
- [Ditch Blocking – Peat Dams](#)
- [Open-range Deer Management](#)

Further information

The methods for heather restoration were initially developed in northern England and have been successfully undertaken on a number of moors in Southern Scotland including at Langholm – www.langholmproject.com.