

Supporting guidance for Away Wintering Sheep

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Date published: 30 March, 2015

Date superseded: 18 March, 2015

The [Away Wintering Sheep](#) option supports the regeneration of heather and other moorland vegetation by reducing or removing the grazing pressure during the winter months.

This is the period during which dwarf shrubs are most likely to be damaged by browsing as the shortage of more palatable grasses drives stock and deer to eat the woody shoots and stems of heather, blueberry and other mountain shrubs and small trees.

High herbivore pressure can suppress the growth of heather and other plants, and lead to loss of cover of these plants in favour of more grazing-resistant grasses.

It can also result in excessive trampling which in turn could lead to erosion of the peat soil.

How to increase the success of this option

- away winter the sheep that are hefted to the area targeted for improvement and not sheep selected across the whole flock
- consider the impacts away wintering will have on deer and, if unfenced, how neighbouring sheep or cattle will use the area
- manage any remaining sheep, cattle and deer to secure the benefits of the reduction in stock number. Once the flock has been reduced the natural instinct of the remaining animals will be to redistribute to fill the space
- you may need to avoid this redistribution, discourage sheep from hefting to the target area or encourage them to graze elsewhere by changing your shepherding, feeding practices and other moorland activities
- consider areas of high grazing or trampling pressure arising from concentrations of stock feeding or sheltering from bad weather
- heather is an easy species to monitor. Look at the percentage of summer shoots which are grazed during the winter. A check in the spring before the ewes return will show if the option is being effective

How to calculate your baseline flock number for away wintering

In your plan provide details of the total number of ewes, gimmers and hogs recorded on the holding as of 1 January for the year of application plus the previous two years.

Payment can only be made for sheep away-wintered in addition to those that are traditionally away wintered.

If you already have an agri-environment agreement containing away-wintering and wish to continue to receive payments for away wintering you must be able to demonstrate that this is required to keep the target area in good condition.

You will need to keep an annual record of stock movements in your diary. The diary can also be used to make other notes that you may find useful to inform your management.

Further information

For more information see [A Guide to Upland Habitats: Surveying Land Management Impacts - Volume 1](#) and [A Guide to Upland Habitats: Surveying Land Management Impacts - Volume 2, Field Guide](#) from Scottish Natural Heritage.

Stocking levels appropriate to each site will vary with factors such as habitat, aspect, soil type, local climate and altitude. The [Supporting guidance for Moorland Management](#) provides help on stocking levels in the different moorland habitats.