

Talladh a Bheithe Estate

Moorland Management Plan

To support
Rural Priorities application Case No. 4888742
July 2013

Prepared By



Alan Boulton
Huntaway Consulting
Ivy Cottage
Torlundy
Fort William PH33 6SW

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1 Introduction

This plan is designed to support an application to the Rural Priorities scheme for the wildlife management option to support deer management which aims to maintain or improve the condition of the Coire Bhachdaidh Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Talladh a Bheithe Estate manages 4270 hectares of land of which 1235 hectares are within the Coire Bhachdaidh SSSI. The Estate boundary, the areas described and the designated site are shown on Map 1.

2 Methodology

This plan has been put together using a mix of research and discussions with Ian Hope and Fiona Mann of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Mr Adrian Van Well representing the Estate owners. Reference has also been made to the Site Management statements, site condition monitoring results and the herbivore impact assessment of 2008 when setting objectives.

3 Designations

1235ha of the Estate land lies within the Coire Bhachdaidh SSSI.

3.1 Coire Bhachdaidh SSSI

Description of the site

Coire Bhachdaidh SSSI is important for its extensive range of upland and montane habitats, rare plants and upland breeding birds. The site lies to the south-east of Loch Ericht. A steep escarpment rises from the loch to a ridge, from which gentle slopes descend to the east and south.

On the steep north-west facing slopes above Loch Ericht, groundwater moves through, or over, the soil surface in what are called “flushes”. Herb-rich grasslands are supported by the minerals that are brought to the surface from the underlying bedrock. Patches of birch woodland and blaeberry-dominated wet heath also occur on these steep slopes, together with acidic grasslands containing such plants as bird’s-foot trefoil, mountain pansy and yellow saxifrage. Patches of dwarf-herb vegetation occur on the exposed high slopes and include prostrate heather heath and moss campion, among others.

An unusually extensive blanket bog covers the southern and eastern slopes. Harestail cotton grass grows among the heather higher up, being replaced by deer grass, cotton grass and purple moor-grass on the lower ground of the southern part of the bog. Tall herbs such as common lady’s-mantle, wood cranesbill and purple saxifrage are found in deep ravines. Screes and boulder fields support a number of ferns.

The rarest plant at Coire Bhachdaidh grows on inaccessible cliff ledges; the endangered whortle-leaved willow. Other rare plants include dwarf birch, sheathed sedge, interrupted clubmoss, Alpine cinquefoil and sibbaldia. Rare birds breed within the SSSI. Merlin nest within the relict birch woods of the north-west slopes. Ring ouzel and a pair of golden eagle nest on the cliffs above the Loch, while ringed plover nest lower down along the shores. Golden plover, red grouse, Ptarmigan, twite,

wheatear and stonechat are all known to breed at the site.

4 Habitat condition

Current condition of the natural features

4.1 SSSI

The breeding bird assemblage was monitored in May 2003 and found to be in an unfavourable condition due to insufficient species being found to meet the qualifying score.

While 5 of the 6 species making up the vascular plant assemblage were found to be in favourable condition, overall the feature was found to be in unfavourable condition (in July 2004). Many of the species deemed to be in favourable condition were only found out of the reach of grazing animals.

Monitoring for the upland habitat assemblage has not yet been completed.

A summary of the latest site monitoring information is given below:

Natural features of Coire Bhachdaidh SSSI	Feature condition (date monitored)
Breeding bird assemblage	Unfavourable No change (May 2003)
Vascular plant assemblage	Favourable declining (August 2008)
Upland habitat assemblage	Favourable maintained (July 2006)

In 2008 a herbivore impact assessment (HIA) was undertaken on the SSSI in response to the unfavourable condition recorded for the vascular plant assemblage in 2004. The unfavourable condition result was due to four plant species having too few or too small a population. At the time this was attributed to heavy grazing by sheep and deer for two of these species. The HIA focussed on the two habitat types where these species would be present, Species rich grassland with matt grass and Tall herb communities.

The tall herb communities proved difficult to assess as the habitat was found at only one of the random points generated. However it was doing very well despite being accessible to deer.

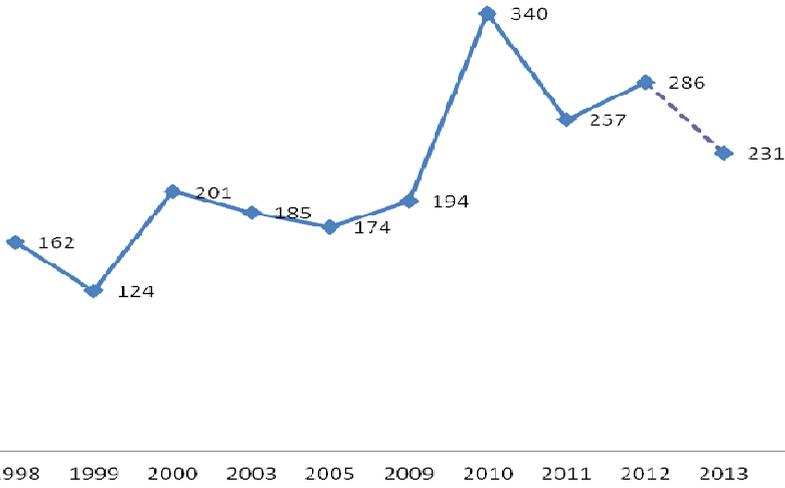
The species rich grassland was assessed at 37 points out of 56 (the remainder being on Coirevarkie Estate) which were concentrated in an area of approximately 50ha in the North West corner of the Estate on the steep slopes above Rubha Ban Mor (shown on map 1)

Levels of grazing were low in all the sample plots, whilst there were some locally high or moderate levels of trampling and/or dunging. The area with the higher levels of trampling and dunging are located in the Talladh a Bheith management unit in the centre of the SSSI. The current impacts are, however, still considered to be relatively low.

The upland habitat assemblage which also includes the moorland and peatland habitats found on the southern and eastern slopes was surveyed in July 2006 and found to be in favourable condition.

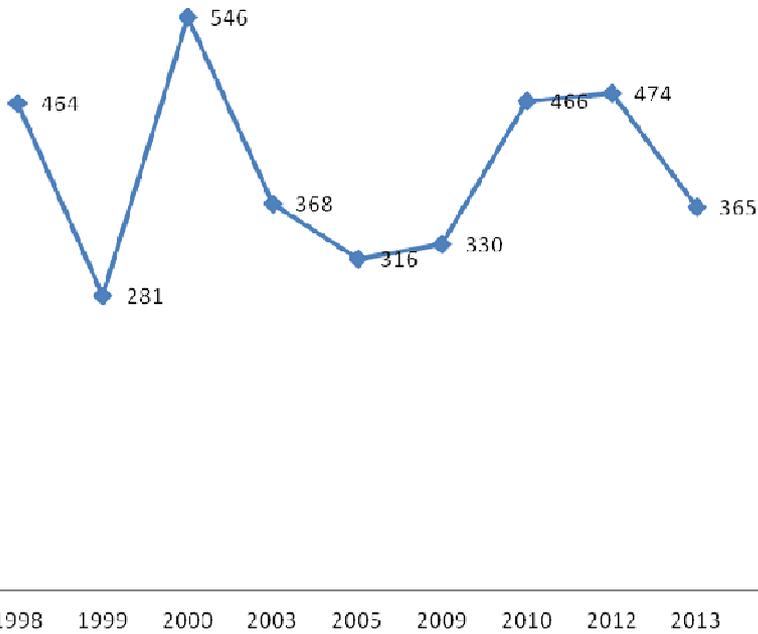
Stags

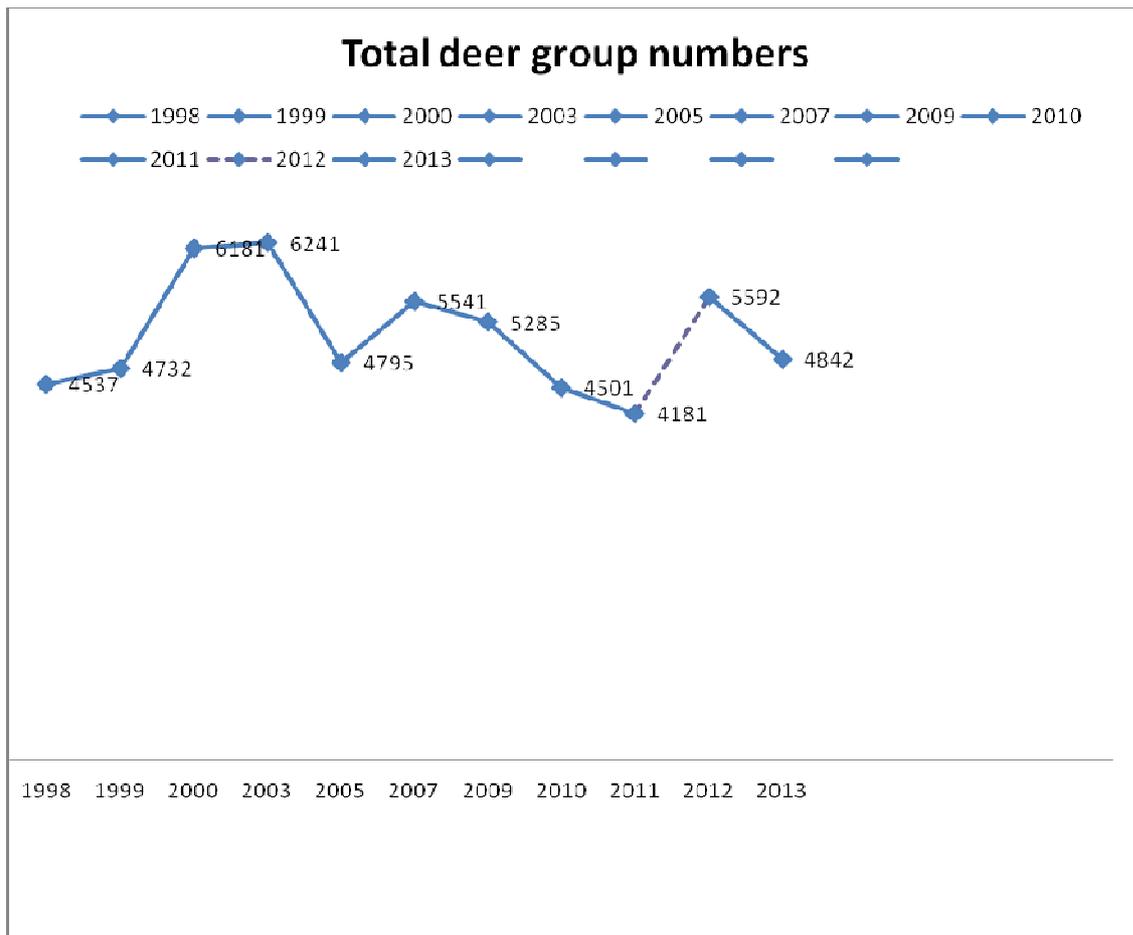
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—◆— 2011 —◆— 2012 - -◆- 2013



Hinds

—◆— 1998 —◆— 1999 —◆— 2000 —◆— 2003 —◆— 2005 —◆— 2009 —◆— 2010
—◆— 2012 —◆— 2013 - -◆-





The trend in stag numbers appears to be rising over the 15 years from 1998 and the hind numbers appear to be stable and very slightly rising. This is in contrast to the whole deer group trend which is stable and falling slightly. However the erratic numbers from year to year demonstrate that this is part of a population with a wider range and the count numbers represent the part of the population present on Talladh a Bheithe in March. The stag feeding is likely to contribute to the rising stag numbers which may not be an accurate representation of the resident population. The hind trend is likely to be more representative of the Talladh a Bheithe population.

5.1 Supplementary feeding

Stags are fed at several feeding stations from the hill park gate towards the dam at the end of Loch Ericht. They are currently fed silage, concentrate cobs and high protein feed blocks.

6 Current management

6.1 Agricultural

The sheep flock was removed from the hill in 2010

6.2 Deer

Talladh a Bheithe is currently run as a sporting estate.

Cull numbers

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Stags	47	50	42	38	46
Hinds	56	55	41	42	56
Calves	23	24	17	12	23

6.3 Moorland

Some muirburn is undertaken on the southern end of the estate. No muirburn has taken place in the SSSI for many years. The Estate has recently commissioned a muirburn plan which has been produced by TEP which is attached as an appendix.

7 Proposed Management

7.1 Culling

- It is proposed to raise the stag cull to 50 and the hind cull to 60 plus calves and to monitor the trend in numbers. If the trend shows a rise in numbers then the culls will be increased.
- A higher proportion of the stag and hind cull will be taken from within the SSSI.
- Hinds on the western slopes of Sron a Claonaidh will be targeted in a south and westerly wind when they may include hinds normally resident on the inaccessible slopes further north in the SSSI.
- Hinds on Creag na lolaire and the high tops near the northern march will be targeted in an east or south east wind when hinds normally resident in the North west corner of the estate in the most inaccessible bit of the SSSI may be accessible.

7.2 Supplementary feeding

It is proposed to begin a reduction in the supplementary feeding of deer. In the first instance this will involve a cessation of the concentrate feeding. This will be followed by a gradual reduction in the silage feeding over the next few years. The feed blocks will be continued as they may prove useful as a diversionary practice to keep numbers down on the SSSI. It is expected that as the numbers resident around the feed stations drop there will be a recovery in the heather

7.3 Muirburn

Muirburn will continue across the estate in accordance with the muirburn code and the estates muirburn plan (attached with the application). In addition there will be some muirburn within the SSSI in the area shown on map 1 where the heather is longest with the aim of producing a mix of heather ages with some younger heather to offer more summer grazing to deer which might otherwise head for the sensitive areas of the SSSI.

8 Monitoring

Deer counting will continue as part of the East Loch Ericht Deer Management Group.

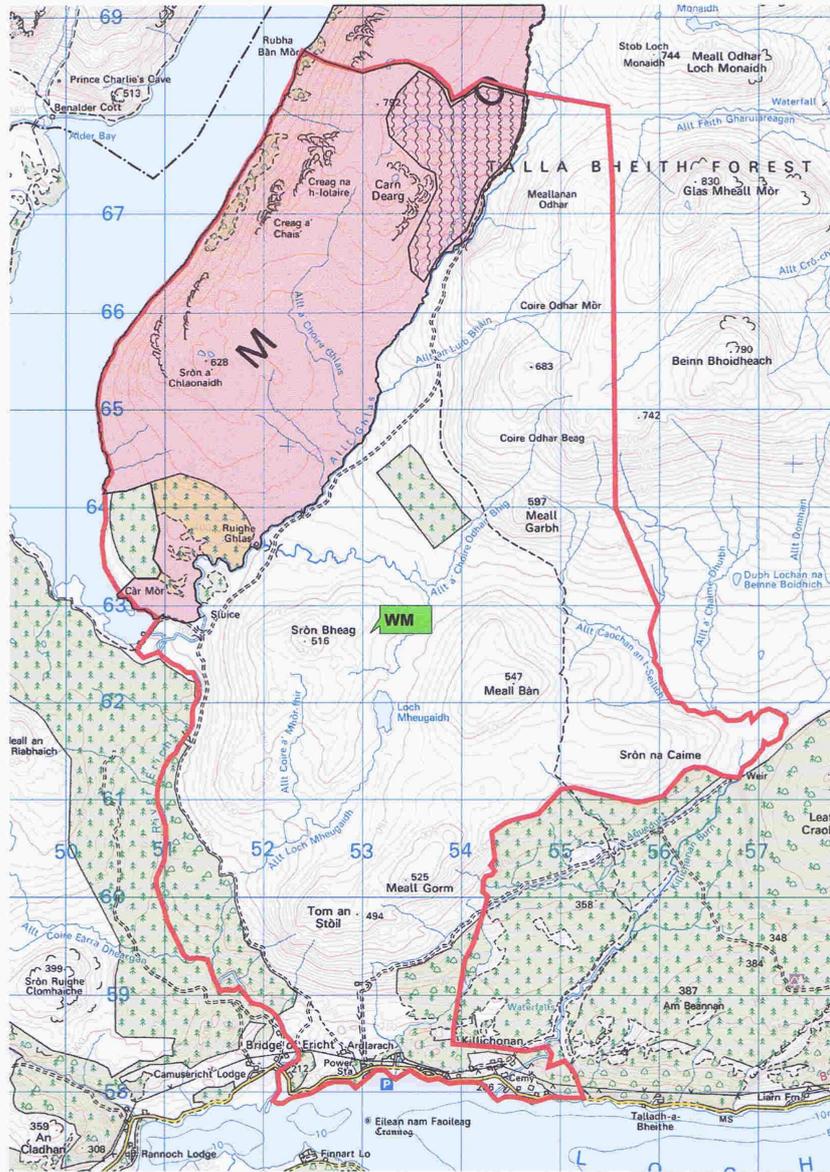
In addition a simple foot count of deer within the SSSI will be done each year in July to establish numbers present at the time of year when deer will influence the condition of the vascular plant assemblage.

9 Summary

This plan supports an application to Rural Priorities for the following option;

Wildlife management on uplands and peatlands 3919Ha

10 Map 1

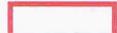


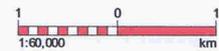
Talladh a Bheith Estate
679/0031

Deer management - SSSI

Rural Priorities

Case No. 4888742

-  CoireBhachdaidh SSSI
-  Proposed muirburn area
-  Estate boundary



Alan Boulton
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