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Highland LBAP Review

Lochaber Implementation Plan 2007-2010

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Lochaber Implementation Plan
2007-2010**

This document was developed by EnviroCentre Ltd. in consultation with the Lochaber Biodiversity Group.

LOCHABER IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2007 - 2010

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1. INTRODUCTION

This implementation plan represents the next step in biodiversity action planning in Lochaber and should be read in conjunction with the Lochaber Biodiversity Action Plan (2004). It has been drawn up by the Lochaber Biodiversity Group and EnviroCentre.

Like the Lochaber Biodiversity Action Plan, this document forms part of a suite of LBAPs and associated Implementation Plans that have been produced for the Highland Council area by local biodiversity groups. It is anticipated that the Highland Biodiversity Partnership will be responsible for working on the strategic and cross-boundary issues identified in each of the LBAPs, and each local biodiversity group is represented on the Partnership. A Highland Biodiversity Action Plan is also underway, to draw out the main issues from the LBAPs and provide a work schedule for the Highland Biodiversity Partnership.

It is therefore envisaged that the Highland LBAP Implementation Plans will be the main tool for local biodiversity groups, funding bodies, other partners, community groups and individuals to make progress on biodiversity issues at a local level.

1.1 *Local Biodiversity Group*

The Lochaber Biodiversity Group is a body of interested individuals representing a number of public sector agencies, NGOs, businesses and individuals that was created to write the initial Lochaber LBAP. The Group is not constituted, does not have its own bank account and is not affiliated to any other organisation.

Membership is as follows:

Adele Beck	Forestry Commission Scotland
Alan Boulton	West Highland FWAG
Alastair Stewart	Highland Council Countryside Rangers
Alison Devey	JMT
Christine Welsh	SNH
Donald Kennedy	SWT/Morvern Community Woodlands
Dot Ferguson	Highland Council
Kay Watson	Highland Council
Lorna Anness	Lochaber Fisheries Trust?
Scott McCombie	NTS
Shona McCauley	Marine Harvest
Stuart Wilkie	Scottish Woodlands

1.2 *Habitats and Species Priorities*

The Lochaber Biodiversity Group has not identified the priorities in terms of habitats or species for the area. The Group concentrated their efforts on producing a set of project proposals that they felt could be delivered in the next three years. A number of other project ideas were identified that the Group thought should be a high priority. These are summarised at the end of this plan.

2. LOCHABER IMPLEMENTATION PLAN PROJECTS

The following three projects were agreed with the local biodiversity group as the priorities for action over the next three years (April 2007 – March 2010). A list of other potential projects and some general issues raised by the local biodiversity group are set out after the project plans.

2.1 *The “Lever and Mulch” method of controlling Rhododendron*

Project aim: To demonstrate effective Rhododendron control using the Lever and Mulch method in Lochaber.

Project objectives: Promote the use of the Lever and Mulch method of *Rhododendron ponticum* control through a number of demonstration/training events, the production of a fact sheet and assess the costs of the method.

Project lead: Morvern Community Woodlands.

Project partners: FCS, Forest Research, Scottish Woodlands, SWT, NTS, SNH, SNW, Sunart Oakwoods Initiative.

Project implementation and outputs:

The Lever and Mulch (LaM) method is a highly effective, efficient and relatively inexpensive technique for eradicating *Rhododendron ponticum*. Plants are effectively dismantled and are uprooted, by hand. The only tools required are small handsaws to exploit natural weaknesses of the plant's growth form and to make best use of leverage. Stems that fail to be uprooted are left with as few buds as possible, so that regrowth is weak and minimal. Uprooted or cut material is not dragged to fires, but is used to mulch all stools that remain with any buds. This not only kills most plants that happen to be left with any buds, but it also leaves a minimum area available for seedling establishment after initial mature plants are killed.

A very high percentage of plants are thus killed outright at the first operation and follow-up work has proved to be extremely easy and efficient. Simple bud-rubbing (with further mulching, if required) has proved to be a highly effective way of killing any plants that do show signs of recovery, particularly if it is undertaken before the first winter following the initial operation. No machinery and no chemicals are needed at any time. Unlike 'cut/burn/spray' methods, there is no need to wait an extra year for regrowth to be sufficient to absorb fatal doses of herbicide, nor for brash to be burned or removed from site to allow access to every stool for spraying. Winter (or the full period from autumn to spring) has generally been found to be the best time to undertake the LaM method. The plant itself appears to be more brittle at this time of year than during the main summer growing season. Access also is generally easier (when bracken, nettles etc., are died-back) and (most important of all), there are no midges!

The project will provide training to crofters, estate managers, agency and NGO management staff and practitioners, in effective means of eradicating rhododendron from river banks, open ground and woodlands. At least 4 courses will run on 2 demonstration sites available free to interested

parties. Key policy staff from FCS and Forest Research will also be involved to highlight the potential of this method and to ensure the LaM method can be adequately funded through future FC grant schemes.

A colour, double-side A4 fact sheet on the LaM method will be produced to distribute to other land managers or the public in Lochaber.

The final piece of work is a "time and motion" study to record the number of person-hours (per hectare) required for complete eradication (including follow-up work) using the LaM method. This study will assess the LaM method in terms of cost effectiveness and be used to inform the management prescriptions (and costs) in the future forestry grant scheme developed under Integrated Land Management Contracts.

Actions:

- Identify two demonstration sites for the training events, and 1 hectare study site;
- Identify trainers and agree dates for courses;
- Book venues, arrange catering and source appropriate equipment;
- Agree training programme and produce event flyer/information;
- Distribute event flyer/information on training programme to land managers, Agency staff, key policy staff and other interested parties;
- Issue press release on training events to local and regional press;
- Hold each training event and collate feedback from participants;
- Tender for suitably qualified contractors to undertake eradication work for work study;
- Identify and appoint researcher to assess the costs of the LaM method undertaken by qualified contractors;
- Researcher to produce comprehensive report on findings;
- Draft text and obtain photographic images for LaM fact sheet;
- Tender for designer and printer;
- Manage tenders and drafting process;
- Promote and distribute fact sheet to land managers, crofters, agency and NGO staff, and others throughout the area;
- Disseminate information on cost effectiveness of LaM method to practitioners and agency staff; and
- Develop management prescription with agency staff for LaM method.

Resources needed:

- Demonstration sites;
- Study site (could be part of demonstration site)
- Trainers;
- Contractors for study site;
- Researcher to undertake cost effectiveness study;
- Venues for training near sites;
- Equipment for training (hand saws);
- Designer and Printer;
- Photographic images; and
- Distribution method for event flyer and fact sheet.

Outputs:

- Actual costs of LaM method determined and compared with other methods of rhododendron clearance for cost effectiveness;
- Land managers, local people and agency staff informed of the LaM method, its effectiveness, and costs;
- Management prescription developed for LaM method for incorporation in future forestry grant scheme;
- Two demonstration sites established and four training workshops run to inform and train practitioners; and
- LaM fact sheet produced and distributed across region.

Proposed timetable:

Course programme, dates, trainers, venue/sites arranged by August 2007. Training events publicised in September and October 2007 (including press release in September). 4 training events run during November 2007 – April 2008. Study site identified by September 2007 and tender for contract and research work issued. Contractors undertake initial clearance working with Researcher in November 2007. Fact sheet text drafted by April 2008. Tender to designer and printer issued in May 2008. Fact sheet printed and distributed in June 2008 (with press release organised). Follow-up work on the study site to be undertaken in summer 2008. Researcher produces final report by October 2008.

Links to UK BAP and Scottish BAP List

R. ponticum is implicated in the decline of, or considered to be a threat to, several UK BAP Priority lower plants and the habitats they occur within e.g. oak woods and mixed ash woods. The lower plant communities of the west coast are of great international importance, not just for their UK BAP species, but assemblages of plant species with very limited distributions. Some, but not all of these sites are designated and therefore may have already attracted some conservation management attention. It is anticipated that this project would target non-designated woodland sites of known importance for lower plants, complementing work undertaken on the designated sites.

Indicative costs:

The following costs have been estimated:

Task/materials	Cash
Trainer fees	£1,200
Venue and refreshments	£200
Equipment (hand saws)	£120
Contractor for study site (1 hectare)	£1,500
Researcher for study site	£1,500
Training flyer (printing/distribution)	£200
Fact sheet photographs	£100
Fact sheet design	£300
Fact sheet printing	£750

Fact sheet distribution costs	£200
Total	£6,070

All budget costs are estimates based on the provision of professional services and some costs maybe provided in-kind by partners or volunteers. The costs for a Project Coordinator are not included in this budget and would be an in-kind contribution by partners.

2.2 *The Conservation of Key Grassland Sites*

Project aim: To conserve important grassland sites in Lochaber.

Project objectives: Establish effective management of key grassland sites across Lochaber to conserve and enhance their biodiversity.

Project lead: West Highland FWAG.

Project partners: SAC, SCF, NTS, JMT, SNH and others

Project implementation and outputs:

Encourage land managers of key grassland sites identified in recent audit to enter agri-environment schemes to conserve and enhance the grass land sites. The grassland audit information will need to be re-visited to determine the status, ownership and management of the sites. Each site will be visited to confirm status and agricultural productivity (this will not be a repeat survey). From this, each land manager will be offered advice on best practice management and entering the appropriate agri-environment scheme (whatever is current in 2007/08). In some cases, the sites in question may have deteriorated due to abandonment, and other options may need to be explored to bring them back into appropriate management. Where possible, grassland site managers will be provided with support to enter the current agri-environment scheme or management prescription most relevant to the site (if this is possible under the current support mechanism).

At the same time, two grassland sites will be identified to promote best practice management for grasslands. With the agreement of the land managers/owners a management plan will be drawn up, with a timetable of actions to achieve the desired outcomes for each grassland site. Where necessary the demonstration sites will be entered into the appropriate agri-environment scheme and further support payments will be made available to ensure best management of each site. Each of the two sites will also be surveyed in 2007 to obtain baseline data, and then surveyed again in 2008 and 2009 to monitor management actions and outcomes. A report on each site will be produced early in 2010.

In addition, the demonstration sites will be promoted through at least 2 training events/workshops in grassland management for land managers in Lochaber.

Actions:

- Contact owners/land managers of grassland sites identified in grassland audit to (a) find out current management of the sites; (b) determine if any grassland sites are under an agri-environment scheme; (c) check if the site still exists; (d) explore future management,

potential for entering agri-environment schemes and interest in becoming a demonstration site;

- Update audit information following discussion with land managers above and through a follow-up site visit to confirm status;
- Identify 2 grassland demonstration sites to promote best practice and gain support from land manager/owner;
- Advise land managers of all grassland sites in the audit on the potential for sites to enter agri-environment scheme/grassland management prescription, and on other beneficial management regimes;
- Where possible assist land managers in gaining entry to appropriate support scheme for grassland management;
- Draw up grassland management plans for the 2 demonstration sites;
- Agree management prescriptions and payment support (if necessary) for each demonstration site;
- Establish monitoring protocols for the two demonstration sites, and obtain baseline data for current status of each demonstration site;
- Arrange trainers, programme, venue and dates for a training event on each demonstration site;
- Produce flyer for training events and distribute widely among crofters, farmers, land managers and other interested parties;
- Run the 2 training events on grassland managers and collate feedback;
- Incorporate any relevant feedback into management plans and actions for the demonstration sites from the training events;
- Produce monitoring report on each grassland site after year 1 and year 2; and
- Review management and status of demonstration sites after year 2.

Resources needed:

- Audit information on grassland sites;
- Site ownership and land managers details;
- Current status and management of sites;
- Agricultural/grassland management expertise;
- Demonstration sites;
- Support payments for demonstration sites
- Field surveyor(s) for demonstration sites;
- Trainers for grassland courses; and
- Venue, catering and flyer for training events.

Outputs:

- Current status of important grassland sites in Lochaber determined;
- Land managers of key sites provided with relevant advice to bring sites under appropriate management;
- A number (unknown at present) of key sites brought into favourable management through entry into appropriate agri-environment scheme or other support mechanism;
- Two demonstration sites established and promoted to land managers and Agency staff;
- Site management plans produced and actions undertaken for both demonstration sites;

- Each demonstration site survey every year for three years and a monitoring report produced on site status in year 3; and
- Event on grassland management held.

Proposed timetable:

Review audit and obtain contact information for sites in April 2007. Contact site owners and discuss site management in May and June 2007. Provide advice to land managers on best practice and potential for entry into current agri-environment schemes from July 2007 to December 2007. Identify (by June 2007) and obtain agreement for 2 demonstration sites by August 2007. Obtain baseline data on demonstration sites by July 2007. Produce management plans, actions, monitoring protocols and support mechanisms by March 2008 for demonstration sites. Organise training events by April 2008. Run training events in June/July 2008. Demonstration sites management actions underway by April 2008 and sites surveyed during 2008 and 2009 field seasons. Review of demonstration sites management and outcomes achieved undertaken by March 2010.

Links to UK BAP and Scottish BAP List

The project has direct links to the UK BAP and Scottish BAP grassland habitats and species.

Indicative costs:

The following costs have been estimated:

Task/materials	Cash
Agricultural/Grassland advice and visit	£1,500
Liaison work with site land managers	£750
Site management plans	£500
Baseline survey	£300
Site support payments	£2,800
Trainer fees	£300
Training event venue and catering	£100
Training event flyer and distribution	£250
Site surveys (years 2 and 3)	£600
Final year report	£250
Total	£7,350

Spend in 2007/08 = £2,850, Spend in 2008/09 = £2,450, Spend in 2009/10 = £2,050.

All budget costs are estimates based on the provision of professional services and some costs maybe provided in-kind by partners or volunteers. The costs for a Project Coordinator are not included in this budget and would be an in-kind contribution by partners.

2.3 Lochaber Species Survey

Project aim: To fill gaps in the knowledge of species distribution in Lochaber and to encourage and undertake species surveys in Lochaber using local people.

Project objectives:

- Initiate recording of locally important species over three years
- Raise awareness of biodiversity among the local community; and
- Encourage community involvement in wildlife recording through active participation.

Project lead: Highland Council Countryside Ranger.

Project partners: Lochaber Natural History Society, Highland Biological Recording Group, Butterfly Conservation Scotland, local groups, NGOs.

Project implementation and outputs:

The project will raise awareness about biodiversity and local wildlife in Lochaber. A postcard with the picture of the species (e.g. peacock or orange-tip) on one side and a return address, with a few details about the species and recording questions, on the reverse will be produced. People will be asked to record where they saw the species and return it to the Countryside Ranger, who will pass on records to HBRC.

A different species will be selected for each year starting from 2007 and continuing for three years until the end of 2009. Suggestions include water vole and chequered skipper.

Records will be collated by the Countryside Ranger, entered onto the appropriate dataset and a short report and map of records produced. Project supported by posters, press advertisements and media articles organised with local groups/schools to search for the species.

Actions:

- Produce an ID postcard for the species with a picture of the species and return address, survey questions on reverse;
- Launch survey with press adverts, media article, posters etc.
- Further media article on survey results so far with call for more records;
- Collate results at end of survey period and produce brief report, map and media article; and
- Repeat process in years 2 and 3 for a different species (as well as promoting the original species).

Resources needed:

- Coordinator to produce postcard, poster, media articles and organise events for each species;
- Colour species postcard;
- Colour species posters;
- Adverts for local press; and
- Coordinator to produce report and map of results.

Outputs:

- Postcards produced for 3 different species for a public survey;
- Survey undertaken for three species, with report and map produced for each species;

- Data collected incorporated into appropriate dataset and uploaded to NBN;
- Local people more aware of species in the survey and the value of recording; and
- A number of local groups and/or schools involved in species recording activities.

Proposed timetable:

Postcards and poster designed and printed in April 2007. Species survey launched in May 2007 with events over survey period. Produce final report and press article in October 2007 on results. Repeat process in 2008 and 2009 for a different species postcard survey.

Links to UK BAP and Scottish BAP List

The project has direct links to the UK BAP and Scottish BAP species selected (e.g. water vole and chequered skipper).

Indicative costs:

The following costs have been estimated for each species:

Task/materials	Cash
Design and printing of poster	£150
Design and production of postcards	£500
Pre-paid postcard return label	£300
Distribution costs	£50
Total	£1,000

Total project is £1,000 for each species in 2007, 2008 and 2009 totalling £3,000.

All budget costs are estimates based on the provision of professional services and some costs maybe provided in-kind by partners or volunteers. The costs for a Project Coordinator are not included in this budget and would be an in-kind contribution by partners.

2.4 Implementation Plan Budget

Rhododendron control	£6,070
The Conservation of Key grassland sites	£7,350
Lochaber species survey	£3,000
Total	£16,420

2.5 Other project suggestions raised by the group

- Part-time, three year Project Coordinator;
- Continuation of LFT project on freshwater invertebrates;
- Habitat network creation;
- Local Biological Record Centre and management of biological data;
- Marine habitat actions;
- Atlantic Oakwoods project; and
- Lochaber Biodiversity Grant Scheme.

3. SUMMARY

The Lochaber Biodiversity Group have proposed, worked up and developed three local area projects for implementation: (i) Rhododendron control, (ii) The Conservation of Key grassland sites, and (iii) Lochaber species survey. Depending upon how these are implemented, all three projects should deliver a range of direct benefits to UK and Scottish BAP targets.