

Forestry Commission Scotland

Technical Guidance for Rural Development Contracts – Rural Priorities

Creating and Restoring Open Habitats from woodland

This guidance is for case officers, applicants, land owners and managers and their agents. The purpose is to inform those considering Rural Priorities (RP) applications for the *permanent removal of areas of woodland to improve biodiversity by creating or restoring open ground habitats*, notably to:

- improve the ecological condition of designated features that require open ground, or
- benefit UK priority habitats or species which require open ground.

The guidance covers the creation or restoration of open ground in the two situations described below. (It does not cover tree removal where natural regeneration or replanting of the wooded area is intended).

Creating/restoring open ground habitat within woodlands or at the forest edge, where as a result of the work proposed the total open ground in the woodland will still be less than 20% of the gross woodland area. This is part of normal woodland design and good practice and can be supported with various sub-options of the *Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG)* Option.

Restoring open habitats on a larger scale, including cases of complete woodland removal. This could not be funded under Woodland Improvement Grant. However options such as *wildlife management on upland and peatland sites*, and the *management/restoration of lowland raised bogs* may be able to support clearance and restoration in this type of project. All permanent woodland clearance of this nature will need to be approved by FCS and meet the [Scottish Government's Policy on Control of Woodland Removal](#).*

*The policy can allow woodland removal without compensatory planting in situations where it would 'contribute significantly to enhancing designated sites, priority habitats and their connectivity, or populations of priority species'. However there is a strong presumption against permanent removal of existing woodland areas with a high biodiversity, scenic, cultural or environmental value.

Requirements

Applicants will need to demonstrate that the proposals would create clear net public benefits for biodiversity in terms of designated features or UK priority habitats or species. A management plan must set out aims and the rationale for the proposed operations.

Areas of woodland which have been in previous forestry grant schemes will be eligible for support, providing that the work activities proposed are not subject to existing grant commitments or payments under these schemes.

1. Creating or restoring open ground habitat as part of a woodland

Support for open ground habitat creation or restoration for biodiversity can be provided under *Woodland Improvement Grant: non-woodland habitats*, where the open habitat is integral to the woodland, that is, either surrounded by woodland or comprising the tree-line/moorland fringe.

Design or management of open ground areas for other biodiversity reasons may also be eligible for support under *WIG -Improving woodland habitats and species*, or *WIG restructuring regeneration*, as long as they are part of the 20% total.

What areas are eligible for support under WIG: non-woodland habitats?

- Areas where open habitat will help to improve or maintain condition of sites designated for habitat features or species, eg in SSSIs, SACs or SPAs (following advice from Scottish Natural Heritage).
- Areas that will become UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority (open) habitat types **or** other open habitats that are required to support UK priority species.

Lists of priority habitat types and priority species can be found on the [UKBAP website](#). The main priority habitat types relevant to Scottish woodlands are likely to be:

- Blanket bog
- Lowland raised bog
- Upland heath
- Upland flushes, fens and swamps
- Wood pasture and parkland (considered non-woodland in cases where canopy cover is under 20%)
- Lowland heath

Applications

Applications need to specify the features, habitats and/or species that will benefit and set out how the proposed actions will achieve this. Individual open areas of under 0.25 hectares are generally too small to be viable as permanent open habitat and will not normally be funded under this option, though there may be exceptions eg for small flushes or fens.

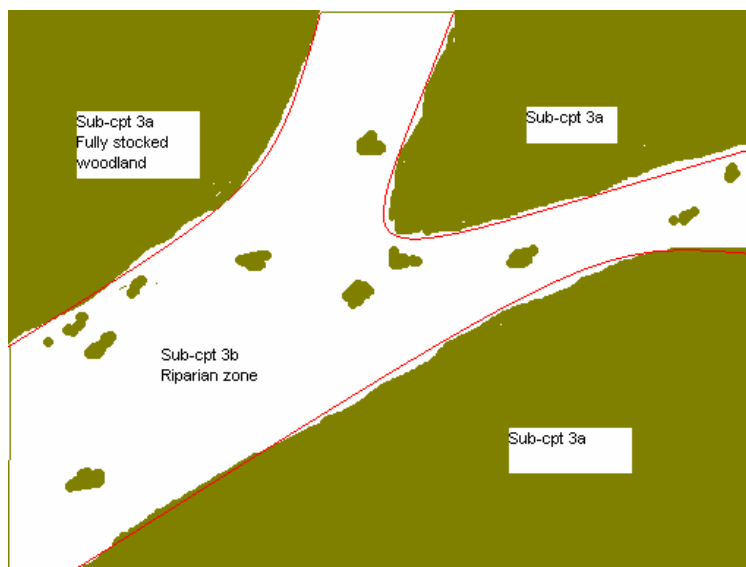
All areas of open ground proposed for grant aid must be marked on appropriate maps at 1:10,000 or larger scale, which must accompany both applications and claims for grant.

Each area of open ground must be assigned a sub-compartment letter that corresponds to the application form details and submitted map.

Mapping mosaics

For sites where intimate mosaics of woodland and open areas are proposed it may sometimes not be possible to map the trees and the open ground precisely. If so the proportions of woodland and open ground within the sub-compartment should be mapped as in the example shown in Figure 1. The contract text must include a description of the intended layout and outcome.

Fig 1. Recording open ground/woodland mosaics



Example Key:

<i>Cpt</i>	<i>Sub-cpt</i>	<i>Operation</i>	<i>Species</i>	<i>Area (of sub-cpt)</i>
3	a	Planting	MC	100%
3	b	open habitat WIG	85%	
		Planting	MB	15%

Red lines indicate sub-compartment boundaries

Where other forms of open ground creation, restoration or management are intended as part of the 20% open ground total, applications for grant under other relevant RDC options (eg *WIG: woodland habitats and species, or WIG restructuring*) should follow a similar approach to application and mapping.

2. Restoring open habitat on a larger scale

Proposals where woodland removal is on a scale which exceeds the normal (20%) provision of open ground within woodlands will need to be consistent

with the [Scottish Government's Policy on Control of Woodland Removal](#).

Proposals will need to be supported with a plan that:

- ❑ identifies the area to be treated and the objective(s) for the work (*designated site enhancement or work to benefit specified UK priority habitats or priority species that require open ground*);
- ❑ describes any regional strategic context or plan that led to the selection of the site(s);
- ❑ clearly sets out the public benefits;
- ❑ meets requirements of EIA Regulations in relation to deforestation impacts;
- ❑ demonstrates how proposals fit with other priorities and with the requirements of the legislation for Natura and SSSI's;
- ❑ relates the area to be treated to the surrounding woodland area and demonstrates any linkage to other important habitats;
- ❑ describes the current condition, the desired end condition and the work required to get there;
- ❑ provides a time scale showing work proposed for up to ten years in detail and up to 20 years in outline;
- ❑ lists the RDC Options to be used and operations and costs;
- ❑ describes any necessary monitoring or reporting.

Mapping

Accurate mapping is a key requirement. It is important to identify clearly each felled woodland area where open ground restoration is proposed and describe the reason (designated feature, habitat or species) and outcome required. Applicants should also provide an operations map showing what work will take place on site throughout the Plan period.

Links to further information

Rural Development Contracts – Rural Priorities Options*:

47 [Woodland Improvement Grant](#)

46 [Sustainable Management of Forests](#)

20 [Management/Restoration of Lowland Raised Bogs](#)

26 [Wildlife Management on Upland and Peatland Sites](#)

28 [Moorland Grazings on Uplands and Peatlands](#)

38 [Management of ancient wood pastures](#)

25 [Lowland heath](#)

17 [Management of Habitat Mosaics](#)

18 [Management of Wetland](#)

*Options in bold are most likely to be relevant to creation/restoration of open habitats from woodlands in Scotland.

FCS Technical Guidance to Management of Ancient wood pasture (in prep).