

2.0 Analysis of previous plan

A scoping meeting was held on 7th June 2012 involving key Forest District staff, to analyse the aims of the previous plan and to agree objectives for the FDP brief. More detail of this meeting can be found in **Appendix 2 – Internal Scoping**.

The previous plan's objectives were primarily the need to continue restructuring work by harvesting coupes designed around crops reaching economic felling age and by prioritising landscape improvement as the main driver for coupe design. The plans also identified a need to improve recreation facilities where they existed and restore PAWS by increasing use of broadleaf native species and natural regeneration.

The previous plan made reference to the long history of afforestation on parts of Lael and noted the threat to conifer species from conifer heart and butt rot (*Heterobasidion annosum*). The restocking plans sought to address this issue by proposing broadleaved species, however the phasing of coupes meant that much of this work inevitably fell beyond the period covered by these plans.

The following paragraphs analyse performance against the specific headings contained in the previous plans.

Economic Issues

Sustainable timber production was a key aim of the previous plan with more appropriate species choice being an important objective. An increase in the area managed under Low Impact Silvicultural Systems (LISS) and Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF) was proposed to manage an improvement in timber quality and landscape diversity. Felling across the FDP area was driven by windblow recovery and the desire to restore significant areas of PAWS in the southern end of the forest. The previous plan noted the good soils present over much of Lael and the consequent potential for growing high quality timber

Thinning at Lael has been limited due to the difficult terrain found in much of the block, however with a developing contract resource equipped to deal with difficult sites this may now change. The previous plan noted that much of the forest is relatively windfirm – certainly by North Scotland standards.

LISS opportunity has been limited by terrain and the forest garden is the most prominent site and remains the best opportunity to adopt alternative silvicultural systems. A large area of natural reserve was proposed on the steep faces below Sron nea – perhaps more due to terrain than particular biodiversity interest.

Social Issues

Landscape improvement was identified in the previous plan as a key element in coupe design. Highland Council and FCS both noted the importance of Lael in the landscape – in terms of both long views from Ullapool and around Loch Broom and as a backdrop to approximately six miles of the A835, a significant tourist route.

Water quality was noted as important in respect of designated sites and the considerable contribution the salmon fisheries make to the local community. In addition the significant hydro-electric developments at Lael have some related infrastructure within the forest. No forestry related issues were recorded regarding water quality during the period.

Environmental issues

Environmental improvement, the encouragement of greater biodiversity, the expansion of native woodland (with particular reference to Planted Ancient Woodland Sites – PAWS) and the maintenance or improvement of water quality were all priority objectives noted in the previous plan for Lael, although the identification of particular species of significance was limited.

The FDP area has a significant woodland history and much evidence of habitation. Archaeology (Unscheduled Ancient Monuments) was managed using the operational work plan system. Archaeological sites have been added to the GIS Heritage Manager package to enable FD staff to identify and manage important sites during operations. In addition an FCS archaeologist has been appointed during the plan period and he is available to advise on local issues.

Important species noted during the previous plan period:

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| • Juniper | <i>Juniperus communis</i> |
| • Grey herons | <i>Ardea cinerea</i> |
| • Peregrine falcon | <i>Falco peregrinus</i> |
| • Red squirrel | <i>Scirius vulgaris</i> |
| • Badger | <i>Meles meles</i> |
| • Pine marten | <i>Martes martes</i> |
| • Scottish wildcat | <i>Felis silvestris grampia</i> |

The expansion of native woodland and the restoration of PAWS across the FDP area has been limited by the coupe phasing and the need to maximise recovery from windblow areas, however going forward this will be much more of a key feature as coupes are clearfelled or converted to LISS.