

BREADALBANE DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN

2016 – 2021

The risks of under grazing

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THE RISKS OF UNDER- GRAZING

The designated habitats in Breadalbane are found in very intimate mixtures with one another across a wide area, and, very often, the grazing regimes required can be contradictory.

In this area, the habitats must often recorded as being impacted most by herbivores are the alpine heaths, which tolerate very little grazing. The grazing regime required to achieve good condition in these habitats will not be sufficient to adequately graze the calcareous grasslands in particular. The HIA in 2007 noted that several of these areas were already tending to become over-rank. Very often they sit side by side at high altitudes, above where any fences are practical. Both are Natura qualifying features.

The montane acid grasslands, comprising a larger area, are also vulnerable to undergrazing, but not to the same extent as the calcareous grasslands.

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Scottish Agricultural Colleges (SAC) and others are increasingly coming to recognize these conflicts, and the management difficulties that can arise from this.

FEATURE NAME	VULNERABILITY TO OVER- & UNDER-GRAZING
Acid Grassland (Mat grass) Acid Grassland (Bent-Fescue)	Low vulnerability to over-grazing. Medium vulnerability to under-grazing
Calcareous grassland (upland)	Low vulnerability to over-grazing. High vulnerability to under-grazing
Dry dwarf-shrub heath	Low to medium vulnerability to overgrazing. Low- medium vulnerability to under-gr
Upland Birch Woodland Upland Oak woodland Upland Mixed Ashwood Alkaline fen	Medium vulnerability to overgrazing. Low to medium vulnerability to under-grazing.(Medium to High vulnerability to NO grazing)
Blanket bog and valley bog Alpine dwarf-shrub heath Wet heath Calcareous rocky slopes Caledonian pinewood Alpine flush	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg); font-size: small; margin-right: 5px;">Increasing attractiveness to herbivores therefore increasing vulnerability to overgrazing if accessible</div> <div style="flex-grow: 1;">Medium vulnerability to overgrazing. Low vulnerability to under-grazing</div> </div>
Alpine summit communities	Medium to high vulnerability to overgrazing. Low vulnerability to under-grazing.
Siliceous scree	High vulnerability to overgrazing. Under-grazing is unlikely to be an issue
Tall herb vegetation	High vulnerability to overgrazing. Under-grazing is unlikely to be an issue
Montane willow scrub	Very high vulnerability to overgrazing. Under-grazing is not an issue

(Table Courtesy of Scottish Agricultural Colleges/ Scottish Natural Heritage)

Undergrazed grasslands could be managed by heavier grazing periodically to prevent excessive growth, but this would then subject the more vulnerable habitats again, and it assumes that sufficient domestic animals and manpower is then available to do this.

The risk of undergrazing, a process that is almost certainly already occurring, is a very real one within this particular DMG, simply because the underlying geology favours calcareous grasslands over a significant proportion of the upland area.

The conflict between calcareous grasslands and alpine heaths will have to be monitored very closely within this five year period.

The habitats very vulnerable to browsing, montane willows etc, are very restricted within this area, being confined to inaccessible ledges and within exclosures. Many of these populations are too small to be considered viable.

The woodland designated sites, while a number of them are in unfavourable condition, are not a driving factor in this particular plan.

Blanket bog, very often a critical habitat on other designated sites, is not a habitat of particular priority within the designated sites of the Breadalbane area, although the areas which exist in the non- designated areas will be subject to habitat monitoring in the forthcoming plan period.