



Original thinking... applied

Bracken Treatment Guidance

Hand Pulling and Whipping

Introduction

This document forms part of guidance published by Natural England, NatureScot, Natural Resources Wales and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (Northern Ireland), Cadw, Historic England, Historic Environment Scotland, Northern Ireland Communities.

This guidance will be revised to incorporate feedback from stakeholders and will be developed further as part of preparing a UK Bracken Strategic Framework.

This Treatment Method should be read in conjunction with the Introductory Document.

Before Undertaking Any Work

- Ensure the work is in line with your 5-year Management Plan.
- Conduct a site survey to establish the presence (or not) of nesting birds - which cannot be disturbed in the breeding season (Mar - Aug). Species such as reptiles should also be undisturbed¹.
- Gain consent from the relevant bodies for any treatment on a SSSI, European Protected Site or Scheduled Monument².
- Determine whether the proposed work falls within the remit of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) (Agriculture) Regulations for your country.
- Complete a written health and safety risk assessment.

Follow-up Treatment

- No bracken treatment method will achieve complete control after one primary treatment. Carefully planned follow-up treatment over several seasons is an essential part of any bracken treatment programme.
- Follow-up treatment can use a different control method to that used initially.

1. Protected species listed under schedules 5, 6 and 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 have special protection under law. It is illegal to disturb or injure such species, or to damage or destroy a structure or place which they use for shelter or protection - even accidentally - without a licence. It is also illegal to uproot or destroy plant species on this list. If a survey indicates they are present and cannot be avoided by moving or timing of treatment, protected species licences may be required.

2. This may involve providing information to inform a Habitats Regulations Assessment or applying for Scheduled Monument Consent.

Summary

Description Pulling of fronds / whipping off the tops of bracken fronds with a stick

Equipment Whipping - stick, cane or light metal rod

Impact Effective if repeated several times each year for several years.

Timing Pulling: July-August. Whipping: May-June

Suitable For

Control of small areas of bracken in sensitive areas where volunteer labour is available.

Other Considerations

- A risk assessment will be required to consider operator safety. Adequate protection against sheep ticks should be provided.
 - Thick gloves are essential for pulling, as the fibres in the stems can cause cuts. Eye protection is also recommended.
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Description/Impact

Pulling

- Hand pulling of live bracken fronds can be an effective means of control, especially on historic sites where machinery use would cause damage. As it is labour intensive, it is unlikely to be a useful primary treatment except where there is a pool of available labour, and/or where the treatment area is small.
- It can be a more useful technique for follow-up treatment, where there is sparse coverage of bracken fronds after primary treatment.
- Pulling should be undertaken in July-August when the stems are strong enough to disturb the rhizomes when pulled.

Whipping

- This involves using a stick, cane or light metal rod to take the tops off young bracken. The aim is to cut the fronds cleanly.
- Whipping is best carried out early in the growing season, in May/June, whilst the fronds are still soft.
- New fronds will appear later in the same season. For the highest level of impact, whipping should take place each time new fronds appear. If the first treatment is early, there could be up to three treatments required each year.

Benefits

- Little preparation is required.
 - Quick and easy to train volunteers.
 - No requirements for expensive equipment.
 - Selective - only bracken plants are affected.
 - Instant results.
 - Useful method for scheduled ancient monuments/historic sites to prevent damage to sites.
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Drawbacks

- Labour intensive.
 - If paid labour is used, costs will be high.
 - Slow work rate.
 - May have limited impact on the rhizomes (root system).
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Equipment/Other facilities

Whipping: sticks, canes or light metal rods.