



Abriachan Wood

Management Plan 2017-2022

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THE WOODLAND TRUST

INTRODUCTION

The Trust's corporate aims and management approach guide the management of all the Trust's properties, and are described on Page 4. These determine basic management policies and methods, which apply to all sites unless specifically stated otherwise. Such policies include free public access; keeping local people informed of major proposed work; the retention of old trees and dead wood; and a desire for management to be as unobtrusive as possible. The Trust also has available Policy Statements covering a variety of woodland management issues.

The Trust's management plans are based on the identification of Key Features for the site and setting objectives for their management. A monitoring programme (not included in this plan) ensures that these objectives are met and any necessary management works are carried out.

Any legally confidential or sensitive species information about this site is not included in this version of the plan.

PLAN REVIEW AND UPDATING

The information presented in this Management plan is held in a database which is continuously being amended and updated on our website. Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations. Please either consult The Woodland Trust website www.woodlandtrust.org.uk or contact the Woodland Trust (wopsmail@woodlandtrust.org.uk) to confirm details of the current management programme.

There is a formal review of this plan every 5 years and a summary of monitoring results can be obtained on request.

WOODLAND MANAGEMENT APPROACH

The management of our woods is based on our charitable purposes, and is therefore focused on improving woodland biodiversity and increasing peoples' understanding and enjoyment of woodland. Our strategic aims are to:

- Protect native woods, trees and their wildlife for the future
- Work with others to create more native woodlands and places rich in trees
- Inspire everyone to enjoy and value woods and trees

All our sites have a management plan which is freely accessible via our website www.woodlandtrust.org.uk. Our woods are managed to the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) and are certified with the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) under licence FSC-C009406 and through independent audit.

In addition to the guidelines below we have specific guidance and policies on issues of woodland management which we review and update from time to time.

We recognise that all woods are different and that the management of our sites should also reflect their local landscape and where appropriate support local projects and initiatives. Guidelines like these provide a necessary overarching framework to guide the management of our sites but such management also requires decisions based on local circumstances and our Site Manager's intimate knowledge of each site.

The following guidelines help to direct our woodland management:

1. Our woods are managed to maintain their intrinsic key features of value and to reflect those of the surrounding landscape. We intervene when there is evidence that it is necessary to maintain or improve biodiversity and to further the development of more resilient woods and landscapes.
2. We establish new native woodland using both natural regeneration and tree planting, but largely the latter, particularly when there are opportunities for involving people.
3. We provide free public access to woods for quiet, informal recreation and our woods are managed to make them accessible, welcoming and safe.
4. The long term vision for our non-native plantations on ancient woodland sites is to restore them to predominantly native species composition and semi-natural structure, a vision that equally applies to our secondary woods.
5. Existing semi-natural open-ground and freshwater habitats are restored and maintained wherever their management can be sustained and new open ground habitats created where appropriate.
6. The heritage and cultural value of sites is taken into account in our management and, in particular, our ancient trees are retained for as long as possible.
7. Woods can offer the potential to generate income both from the sustainable harvesting of wood products and the delivery of other services. We will therefore consider the potential to generate income from our estate to help support our aims.
8. We work with neighbours, local people, organisations and other stakeholders in developing the management of our woods. We recognise the benefits of local community woodland ownership and management. Where appropriate we allow our woods to be used to support local woodland, conservation, education and access initiatives.
9. We use and offer the estate where appropriate, for the purpose of demonstration, evidence gathering and research associated with the conservation, recreational and sustainable management of woodlands. In particular we will develop and maintain a network of long-term monitoring sites across the estate.
- 10 Any activities we undertake will conform to sustainable forest management principles, be appropriate for the site and will be balanced with our primary objectives of enhancing the biodiversity and recreational value of our woods and the wider landscapes.

SUMMARY

This public management plan briefly describes the site, specifically mentions information on public access, sets out the long term policy and lists the Key Features which drive management actions. The Key Features are specific to this site - their significance is outlined together with their long (50 year+) and short (5 year) term objectives. The short term objectives are complemented by a detailed Work Programme for the period of this management plan. Detailed compartment descriptions are listed in the appendices which include any major management constraints and designations. A short glossary of technical terms is at the end. The Key Features and general woodland condition of this site are subject to a formal monitoring programme which is maintained in a central database. A summary of monitoring results is available on request.

1.0 SITE DETAILS

Site name:	Abriachan Wood
Location:	Loch Ness
Grid reference:	NH575357, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 26
Area:	163.22 hectares (403.33 acres)
Designations:	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Ancient Woodland Site

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary Description

Abriachan Wood is spectacular. From veteran hazels to huge scree slopes and jaw dropping views over Loch Ness, this place has something for every visitor. The path network takes the visitor through hazel, birch and open ground, past bluebells, butterflies and birdlife and links in with the wider path network of Abriachan Forest Trust.

2.2 Extended Description

Location and history

Abriachan Wood occupies a three mile stretch of the north-western shore of Loch Ness, between eight and eleven miles south of Inverness. It occupies a prominent position in the landscape and borders the main A82 Fort William to Inverness trunk road, a popular tourist route. The woodland is divided into two separate sections on either side of the 'B' road between the community of Abriachan and the shore of Loch Ness. The southern section is contiguous with the community-owned Abriachan Forest Trust site, which lies to the west.

Abriachan Wood is part of an extensive area of ancient native woodland remnants on the shores of Loch Ness (including other Woodland Trust properties at Urquhart Bay Wood and Balmacaan Wood). It is likely that it has been exploited and managed by local people to a varying degree for many centuries with periods of felling of oak, coppicing of hazel, grazing and muirburn. The

presence of several ancient woodland lichen species (which require continuity of habitat and colonise very slowly) on hazels suggest that harvesting was by selection of individual stems, rather than cutting the whole stool. A path running from the southeast corner of the woods (Clansman Hotel) through the woods and towards the community of Abriachan is known to have been the 'coffin trail' between the settlement and the local burial ground. Approx. 2/3 of the site is recorded as Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) on the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI).

In 1976, under Forestry Commission ownership, small-scale exotic conifer stands were established throughout the southern section of the site. In 1989 the wood was placed on the Forestry Commission disposal list, and recognising the amenity and nature conservation value of the site, the local community saw a chance of securing the wood's future by approaching the Woodland Trust. With the help of grant aid from Scottish Natural Heritage and generous local fundraising, the Woodland Trust was able to acquire the site in 1995.

Since acquiring the woodland, the Woodland Trust has, with funding from the Forestry Commission and the Millenium Forest Trust, worked to restore the woodland to a wholly native composition, and to develop access opportunities for locals and visitors.

Geology and Soils

The site lies along the Great Glen Fault; the underlying rock is principally comprised of granite with some Moine schist (quartz-feldspar-granite). It is on moderately to very steep southeast facing slopes rising from 25-400m, with large rocky outcrops and cliffs and large areas of exposed scree slopes with boulder fields below. The slopes in the northern section are higher, steeper and rockier and are bisected by deep vertical-sided gullies. Both sections contain small permanent streams that drain from the moorland above. The catchments on the southern flank of the northern section provide the water supply for the houses below.

There is a fairly complex mosaic of mainly acid soil types with some neutral and base-rich pockets. These include brown forest soils, humus iron podzols and rankers with some gley soils on the occasional areas of impeded drainage.

Plant Communities

The considerable variation in soil and drainage across the site is apparent in the fragmented mosaic of vegetation communities across the site. There are at least eight distinct National Vegetation Classification (NVC) types present [Morris 1997] and three Habitat Action Plans (Upland Ash, Upland Oakwood and Birchwood) apply to the wood.

In the southern block the middle slopes are predominately remnant birch wood surviving from, what were, formerly oak/birch woodlands. Most of the oak has been removed from the wood by felling. In the richer soils on the lower slopes, ash becomes more common and there is an extensive area of hazel wood, totalling 18ha. There are large groups of alder on the wettest areas at the base of the slope and along the lower stream banks. Aspen, wych elm, bird cherry, rowan, goat willow, holly, hawthorn and juniper are also present. Small scale conifer blocks dating from c. 1970 and totalling c. 20 ha were felled to recycle in 2001 to allow restoration to native woodland. In 2004-05 enrichment planting with oak, ash and aspen in open glades was carried out over some 5ha. Much of this planting has failed through heavy browsing by deer. Regeneration of birch and hazel is occurring in

places through the lower areas of the southern block (compartment 2a), typically where human disturbance is higher. Deer browsing and erosion of soils is very high in places and evident throughout the whole block through a lack of regeneration for much of the block.

In the northern block (compartments 1a and 1b), the woodland is predominately upland birch, and is mature and quite dense in the southwest corner where there is also a small oakwood. Tree cover becomes more open and fragmented towards the north. As the woodland reaches its upper boundary, it gradually grades into gorse scrub, which is very dense in places, and then into wet and dry heathland over the open tops. Here the birch and some small areas of Scots pine are regenerating. There is less diversity of tree species here than in the southern block. In the past, natural regeneration has been inhibited by sheep grazing, muirburn, browsing by deer, and the spread of bracken. Bracken is hugely dominant across large parts of the lower slopes of this block (1b), and a significant area is a monoculture of bracken with open birch woodland. Due to the steepness of this block, deer management is only really practical in small locations, making disturbance of deer an essential management technique.

Deadwood is found in patches, and is generally poorly represented. Due to the naturalness of the site, and lack of information on saproxylic invertebrates, the creation of additional deadwood beyond tree safety work is not necessary at this time.

Lichens

A survey of lichens in 2001 found a rich community, with 251 lichen taxa recorded. Site assessment (based on the epiphytic lichen interest) is set at Grade 4 - Regional Importance. This grading is awarded particularly for the species-rich lichen flora on hazel, including the presence of viable populations of several species of the Lobarion community that are nearing the eastern limit of their range in Scotland (e.g. *Degelia atlantica*, *Lobaria amplissima* and *Parmeliella testacea*). It is also important for the presence of two Red Data Book species *Lecidea erythrophaea* (on hazel) and *Schimatomma graphidioides* (a UK BAP species, on oak) [Coppins 2001].

Wildlife

Pine marten, red squirrel, wildcat, red and roe deer and badger have been recorded on the site or in the local area. A wide range of woodland birds is present including redstart, spotted flycatcher and willow warbler, along with black grouse on the higher moorland areas.

3 Species Action Plans (Red Squirrel, Black Grouse and Juniper) apply to the wood.

Services and Access

There are two way leaves for power lines; one along the top boundary of the southern section and another above Abriachan Gardens and Nursery.

Management access is limited due to the steep slopes although a well surfaced track allows access on the western boundary. A broad 'quad' track runs diagonally through the southern compartment along the route of the 'old coffin trail'.

3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

3.1 Getting there

By bus:

Bus services (Citylink 917 and 919) operate between Drumnadrochit and Inverness and pass Abriachan Wood on the main A82 road. Passengers may request a stop at the Clansman Hotel, but should note that request stops are granted at the driver's discretion.

By train:

Inverness Station is located in the city centre. It is about 14 miles (22.5km) to the north-east of Abriachan. For further information on public transport, contact Traveline on 0871 200 2233 or visit traveline.org.uk

By car:

From Inverness, take the A82 south-west. Abriachan is about 14 miles (22.5km) from the city centre.

Parking: There are a number of access points to the wood. Parking is available at the Clansman Hotel on the A82 (courtesy use for visitors to Abriachan Woods). You can enter the woodland from the North end of the car park.

Parking for up to five cars is also available at the Abriachan Gardens (courtesy use for Woodland Trust Visitors) off the A82. A path into the wood starts from the car park.

Another option is to walk to Abriachan Wood through the adjacent Abriachan Forest Trust land. Parking is available at the Abriachan Forest Trust main entrance, east of the village near Loch Laide (grid ref. NH 540 354).

3.2 Access / Walks

The wood lies on either side of a minor road that leaves the A82 and heads uphill to the village of Abriachan. In the section of woodland that is on the south side of the Abriachan road, there is an extensive network of grassy paths, some of them steep in places. The northern section is steeper and rocky, and has no access provision.

The most convenient access to the wood is from the car parks at the Village Hall in Abriachan, at Abriachan Gardens (at the northern end of the wood's southern section) and from the Clansman Hotel, which is at Brachla by the main A82 at the wood's southern end. There is also an entrance track from Balcharaggan (grid ref. NH 565 342).

There are steps at the start of the path from Abriachan Gardens and a long flight of steep steps below the Balcharaggan entrance.

The network of paths in the wood's southern section totals about two miles (3.4km). They include an ancient Coffin Trail, once used to carry the dead on their final journey to burial. It zigzags up from the loch side to the settlements of Balchraggan and Abriachan.

A public right of way runs through the southern section of the wood from the Clansman to Balchraggan. It is used for recreation and access by local people and tourists. In addition, there is a disused cart track, which climbs up from the loch side. An informal pathway links the top of this track with the public right of way.

In the northern section, trails are steep and rocky, so walking in this part of the wood suits the more active (do wear sturdy footwear). Keen walkers can use the trails at the top of the wood to link with a wider network of Abriachan Forest Trust walks.

Recommended walks include:

Clansman to Balchraggan (The old Coffin Trail)

The path follows the last route many local people took to their final resting place on an ancient right of way. The funeral cortege would have stopped to rest along the way at the spectacular viewpoints.

The path runs diagonally down the hillside. Start at the Clansman Hotel. Allow one hour, distance 1.2 miles (2km).

Abriachan Nursery to Clansman (Woodsmen Trail)

The old road to Abriachan has been reopened and links with a new path to the Clansman Hotel. Follow the footsteps of woodsmen of the past through hazel woods that would have provided wood-fuel and shelter. Hazels here were cut for rods to make creels and barrels. Allow one hour, distance 1.2 miles (2km).

To the west of Abriachan Wood, is the community-owned Abriachan Forest Trust (AFT) site, with an extensive network of walking and mountain bike trails. These link to the Woodland Trust paths at the Corryfoyness track.

4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

The long term vision for Abriachan Wood is for a biologically rich semi-natural woodland habitat, which forms part of a functional woodland habitat network on the north western shore of Loch Ness.

The processes of natural succession will remain dynamic within the woodland resulting in evolving age structures and densities of cover. The rich flora and fauna associated with the ancient woodland component of the site will remain secure, and woodland specialist flora will be at least frequent throughout the woodland by 2025.

Open ground is an important component of this woodland. A Species Action Plan for black grouse applies to the wood, which relies on woodland edge habitat. Anecdotally, glades within the site are good for pearl bordered fritillary. Gradual colonisation of Scot's pine and birch on the upper slopes of the northern block (1a) will expand the area of woodland cover within our ground and hopefully increase woodland edge size as a consequence. Important glades within the woodland will be identified and could be retained, with bracken management occurring where required.

Threats to the site's ancient and semi-natural woodland features will be monitored, in particular the impact of deer browsing on young planted woodland areas, exotic tree regeneration in restored PAWS compartments, and bracken cover on tree seedling recruitment throughout the site. Where a significant threat is identified, appropriate control and/or protection measures will be maintained or introduced.

The site will provide an extensive area of quiet informal recreation to a wide range of users both from the local community and from further afield. There will be a network of paths providing a range of linear and loop routes suitable for walkers and horse riders, and linking to the surrounding path network. Interpretation will be maintained and renewed as required to highlight the conservation value and historic interest of the site.

5.0 KEY FEATURES

The Key Features of the site are identified and described below. They encapsulate what is important about the site. The short and long-term objectives are stated and any management necessary to maintain and improve the Key Feature.

5.1 Mixed Habitat Mosaic

Description

With elevations from 25-400m and a complex pattern of soil types and drainage patterns, the overlying vegetation has developed into a pattern of mosaics, with various NVC woodland and heath communities interspersed throughout.

There is no clear and absolute distinction between the woodland types. However the following are represented across the site:

W9 Upland Mixed Broadleaf.

Mainly over the lower slopes of compartment 2, with hazel being the dominant species, probably due to past management. The ground-flora is quite lush, and in areas of flushing, or alongside burns, becomes rich and diverse.

W11 Upland Oak-Birch with Bluebell

This type of woodland comprises the majority of the lower slopes in compartment 1 and is a significant component of compartment 2. Due to past management practises, oak is only a minor component and silver birch is the dominant species. The ground-flora is grassy, and herb-rich and bracken is present, becoming dominant in open patches.

W17 Upland oak-birch with blaeberry

This woodland is the more prevalent type on the upper ground and in drier areas. The dominant ground layer in this community is heathy type. As with the previous woodland, the oak component has been removed in the past, and birch dominates.

Open ground occupies c. 40% of the total site, (approx 64% in compartment 1 and 17% in compartment 2) although the majority of this area is in sub compartment 1a on the heathy hilltops. Elsewhere, there are pocket of heathy ground and some extensive areas of bracken.

The heathland varies considerably with the underlying changes in bedrock, soil and topography. Well-drained areas are occupied by dry heath, which grades into wet heath where hollows occur, or where drainage is impeded or concentrated. Flushed areas that follow the burns down through the dry heath support a richer, more diverse form of the wet heath. Birch, and to a lesser extent Scots pine, are regenerating into the heathland communities, and it is likely that scattered tree cover will establish at the higher elevations over time.

Bracken is frequent as an understory in the oak-birch woodland on the site, becoming abundant in open areas. On the upper slopes large areas of bracken have a relatively grass or heath rich under layer, but at lower elevations, out-with the tree canopy, bracken tends to become overwhelmingly dominant.

There are areas of dominant gorse towards the southern end of sub compartment 1a. Both bracken and gorse have been controlled previously with some limited success in order to encourage native tree regeneration.

Significance

The site supports an unbroken succession of habitats from lochside to high moorland.

Site habitats included in the Habitat Action Plans (HAPs) are Upland Ash, Upland Oakwood and Birchwood.

Species included in Species Action Plans (SAP) and Species Action Frameworks (SAF) are Schimatomma graphidioides (a lichen) Red Squirrel, Pearl Bordered Fritillary, Black Grouse and Juniper.

Opportunities & Constraints

The site offers the opportunity to maintain and enhance a continuum of habitat types from elevation 25m to 400m.

Deer browsing and areas of dominant bracken and gorse are a constraint on successful tree regeneration and establishment. As deer numbers are so high, a quick reduction in deer numbers does provide an opportunity to allow a pulse of regeneration to come away given so much checked regeneration and bare ground on tracks, wallows, etc.

Young woodland is becoming rapidly established along the A82. Difficult access and constraints from BEAR make it tricky to manage this proactively and cheaply.

Factors Causing Change

Grazing, browsing, and ground damage by deer.

Encroachment of bracken and gorse.

Non-native conifer regeneration.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

There will be a diversity of semi-natural woodland and non-woodland habitats across the site.

The proportion of woodland cover to open ground in will be gradually increasing, however it is anticipated that at least 50% open ground habitat will persist within the mosaic of compartment 1, and at least 15% in compartment 2 .

A permanently irregular age structure will be developing at whole site level, creating opportunities for the recruitment of future veteran trees and the ongoing retention of associated ancient woodland species.

Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)

Recruitment of new trees:

To reduce deer damage levels from 2017 score of 18 (using WT deer damage assessment form) to at least 14 by 2022 through:

1. Deer management carried out by a reputable competent deer manager, who maintains a presence across the site throughout the year.
2. Integrated deer management with neighbouring landowners agreeing a strategy for reducing deer damage throughout the wider woodland area, including improving access.
3. Reliable data collection through annual deer damage assessment monitoring to evaluate success. 2017 data shows 100% of trees under 2m in Compartment 2 and 93% of trees under 2m in Compartment 1 are showing signs of deer damage.

- In compartment 2, Install at least four 20m x 20m deer proof enclosures that are planted with aspen, rowan, oak, with juniper and holly by 2020. These would be in existing open ground and sites selected to reduce visual impacts.
- Replace dead trees in 2015 planting, on the basis that deer damage will be reduced before they reach the top of the shelters.
- Within the life of this Management Plan, to investigate funding streams to manage up to five bracken dominated open areas in compartment 1b. If funding is forthcoming, to carry out bracken control within these, with a view to fencing and planting these areas within the 2022 to 2027 plan cycle.
- Control bracken within existing areas of planting.

Retention of open ground habitats:

- To carry out baseline fixed point photography along the woodland edge to monitor rate of spread of gorse, bracken, and native tree species. By June 2018, to have points GPS'd and images taken. Second set of images taken in June 2022 to allow time to evaluate prior to review of Management Plan.
- To work with BEAR to retain a clearer edge along the A82 by removing any problem regeneration when carrying out tree safety works and working with BEAR to carry out any works within their programme. Surveys along the road carried out in October 2017, 2019, 2021.

Other management:

- Maintain vehicle access by removing gorse from the Corriefoyness track on the western edge of compartment 2B and bracken and broom from the access to Achculin on the southern edge of compartment 1a from Lower Balmore annually.
- Remove redundant tree shelters from grown trees and tidy up failed plantings through beating up or removing shelters through compartment 2a and 2b. All redundant shelters within sight of paths to be removed by the end of 2019. All redundant shelters to be removed from the site by the end of the plan period.
- Remove non native tree regeneration through sweeping sections of the wood annually, achieving total coverage in the plan period.

5.2 Ancient Semi Natural Woodland

Description

Approximately half of the site is recorded as Ancient Semi Natural Woodland on the Ancient Woodland Inventory. This area runs the full length of the site parallel to Loch Ness and rising to an elevation of 150-200 feet up the hillside. It supports a wide variety of habitats; broad-leaved deciduous woodland; mainly upland birch wood, hazel wood, wet and dry acidic heath, acidic grassland, screes, cliffs, wet flushes and riparian zones.

Significance

The wood is classed as Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland and forms part of a larger complex of ancient woodlands in the Loch Ness catchment that includes other Woodland Trust properties, Urquhart Bay Wood (SSSI) and Balmacaan Wood, nearby. Important ancient woodland areas are concentrated along Loch Ness side and the main catchments of the Enrick and Coiltie with connections to RSPB at Corrimony and beyond to FCS NNR at Glen Affric.

There is a rich lichen community, with 251 lichen taxa recorded (Coppins 2001).

Management and maintenance of the ASNW component on the site contributes to meeting the Woodland Trust objective of 'No further loss of ancient woodland'.

Opportunities & Constraints

With ongoing restructuring of exotic conifer plantations owned by Abriachan Forest Trust to the West of compartment 2, there is the opportunity in the longer term to expand the core area of native woodland.

Deer browsing is a constraint on successful tree regeneration and establishment. However, a quick reduction could allow a pulse of regeneration to come away given the short field layer and bare ground in places.

The important lichen community supported by the wood is highly dependent on the retention of veteran hazel stools. Sensitive coppicing could be undertaken to ensure there is diversity in the age structure of stools to ensure there is a sustainable habitat for the lichen communities reliant on them.

This would only be done in close cooperation with specialists.

Dominant bracken in some areas is inhibiting tree regeneration and may reduce the habitat value of open glades, especially for Pearl Bordered Fritillary. Bracken control in selected areas could provide the opportunity to diversify the habitat mosaic.

Access is a constraint to management activities due to the steep slopes and difficulties in getting off the A82 into compartment 1 in particular.

Factors Causing Change

Natural succession.

Grazing, browsing and ground damage by deer .

Encroachment of bracken.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

The total area of ancient woodland will not diminish.

Species and assemblages associated with the ancient woodland habitat will remain secure.

The processes of natural succession will remain dynamic within the ancient woodland resulting in evolving structures and densities of cover.

Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)

To reduce deer damage levels from 2017 score of 18 (using WT deer damage assessment form) to at least 14 by 2022 through:

1. Deer management carried out by a reputable competent deer manager, who maintains a presence across the site throughout the year.
2. Integrated deer management with neighbouring landowners agreeing a strategy for reducing deer damage throughout the wider woodland area.
3. Reliable data collection through annual deer damage assessment monitoring to evaluate success. 2017 data shows 100% of trees under 2m in Compartment 2 and 93% of trees under 2m in Compartment 1 are showing signs of deer damage.

- If funding is forthcoming, to identify and manage up to five areas in the northern block (1b) for bracken by the end of the Management Plan period. Nine polygons totalling five hectares have been identified in compartment 1b. These are bracken dominant areas south facing with the possibility of fencing within them. Following ground truthing, the five most practical locations for control and fencing will be chosen. Each fenced area to measure 50m x 50m (0.25ha) as far as is practically possible.

- To investigate the pro's and con's of coppicing hazel in compartment 2 for lichen communities within this Management Plan period.

5.3 Connecting People with woods & trees

Description

This site is part of the Welcoming Sites Programme, which aims to improve the visitor experience to this site. As a consequence of this, there are a number of actions detailed below that aim to improve the offer to visitors against the aims of the Welcoming Site Programme.

Abriachan Wood occupies a three mile stretch of the A82 along the North shore of Loch Ness and is admired by the heavy tourist traffic that passes by, uses the layby's across the road from the site, or stop at Abriachan Gardens, The Clansman Hotel, or take a boat tour with Jacobite cruises. It is a key part of a dramatic landscape with a high tree line, large cliffs and steep scree slopes.

Abriachan Forest Trust owns and manages 534ha of adjacent forest and open ground to the West of the southern block (compartment 2). They hold community events and have a popular mountain bike track.

The southern section contains a network of 3.4 kms of footpaths, including an ancient 'coffin trail' which zigzags up from the lochside to the settlements of Balchruggan and Abriachan. Other paths take you to various vantage points and through routes, although there is no waymarking. The paths, including the right of way along the routes known as the old coffin trail are generally well drained and informally surfaced with grass for the most part, although some routes are bare ground with roots and rocks on the surface. Sections of the paths can be muddy, and are due for upgrade. Throughout the site, the paths are steep in many places, have several sets of steps and over mostly grass covered.

The paths are well used by locals and visitors who can expect to ascend through the ancient woodland habitats and be awarded with stunning views to the south over Loch Ness. Car parking facilities are by permission of neighbours at The Clansman Hotel (15 spaces plus mini bus and coach parking, and always very busy) at the southern end of the wood, Abriachan Gardens (five car parking spaces) at the northern end of the southern block (compartment 2) and at Abriachan Village Hall (ten car spaces). There is no formal public access to the northern section (compartment 1). The site is highly visible to traffic travelling on the A82, from boat traffic on the Loch and from the southern shore along a minor road.

The area receives over 200,000 overseas visitors per year. Drumnadrochit statistics for domestic visitors from Visit Scotland recorded 19,000 day trip and 76,000 overnight stays. In Loch Ness side (postcode IV3 8AU) there are 137 residents, within postcode IV3 there are 22,376 as this includes parts of the west of Inverness. The community of Abriachan has around 120 residents.

There are currently no people engagement events planned for Abriachan Wood. The site has potential to deliver events if deemed appropriate and would be done in conjunction with neighbouring landowners who grant permission to use their car parks. There are no brand moments currently delivered on the site. Abriachan Forest Trust run a range of outdoor learning activities, including volunteering and community events. As Abriachan Forest Trust carry out many activities with schools, it is felt best to not have any objectives to engage with schools on this site, unless it would work alongside or compliment the work of Abriachan Forest Trust.

There are two other Woodland Trust sites within close proximity to this site, Urquhart Bay and

Balmacaan.

There is currently a volunteer warden who lives nearby the site.

Two information panels, that are joint with Abriachan Forest Trust, sit at the entrance into the wood by the Clansman Hotel, and another in the Abriachan Gardens car park. There are five public entrances, two of which have ladder board entrance signs and the other three have smaller wooden entrance signs. All of these gain access to the southern block (compartment 2a and 2b). There are two entrances for management purposes into the northern block (compartment 1a and 1b).

There are six benches on the trails that give views across Loch Ness (in places), and two picnic tables at the top of the site, on the Great Glen Way.

The site is informally used by mountain bikers using two self-developed downhill routes that are long established. One is to the West of the site (compartment 2b), the other at the East side of the southern block (compartment 2a). Walkers, horse riders and mountain bikers use the Great Glen Way that runs along the top of the southern block (compartment 2b).

Significance

Abriachan wood is an important landscape feature and contributes to the iconic setting of Loch Ness.

A visit to the site offers the opportunity to experience a diverse and attractive ancient woodland with a rich ground flora, and dramatic views over Loch Ness.

Loch Ness is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Scotland and Abriachan Wood provides one of the most accessible opportunities to enjoy the scenery away from the busy main road. The site is only about 15 minutes drive from the tourist hub of Drumnadrochit and immediately adjacent to the Clansman Hotel and Jacobite boat tours.

Public access to the wood is important to the local community and the adjacent Abriachan Forest Trust. For local people, the site offers a quiet retreat from the busy tourist trail in the area and connects well with Abriachan Forest Trust land.

It is situated within a twenty mile radius of a population of over 50,000 including the city of Inverness.

Opportunities & Constraints

The path network links to Abriachan Forest Trust wood and the Great Glen Way (one of Scotland's long distance walking routes from Fort William to Inverness), which takes people to Abriachan from Drumnadrochit. There are opportunities for joint promotion of the network and working with the Great Glen Rangers to include work of the Woodland Trust beyond our own ground.

The Clansman Hotel, Abriachan Gardens, and the Jacobite boat and bus tours are all on the doorstep and interact with hundreds of thousands of visitors over the course of the year. Information in the form of leaflets and posters in the hotel and providing the guides with information on the wood and the work of the Woodland Trust. Signage from the car park at the Clansman would need to be improved to guide visitors from the hotel to the entrance of the wood, by agreement with the Hotel and the owner of the woodland between the hotel and our boundary. New entrance signage here would improve the welcome and encourage visitors to enter the woodland.

There is little opportunity to deliver brand moments at this site due to the topography. Due to the small population size nearby and the difficulty in parking a number of cars without inconveniencing the owners of these car parks, promoted public events would not be appropriate for this site.

The High School nearby, who are already working well with FCS in outdoor education, could be involved in the management of the site through the Curriculum for Excellence and John Muir Award, this could be done in partnership with Abriachan Forest Trust.

Any increase in promotion will need to be matched with an increase in funds for path improvements.

New waymarking and signage would assist less confident walkers in navigating their way round the wood.

As the paths are all on fairly steep ground, an increase in seating with well-maintained viewpoints out to the loch would encourage more visitors to go up from The Clansman.

Closer links could be forged with Abriachan Forest Trust through closer joint working on deer management, path maintenance, interpretation, and school and community engagement.

There are potentially volunteer opportunities through the organising of dedicated work parties to carry out path repairs, bracken control and tree planting, for example. Should a group of people wish to carry out volunteer work on the site, these are an example of the sorts of activities that could be undertaken.

The steep gradients and unstable scree in compartment 1a and 1b make it unsuitable for formal access development.

Abriachan Woods have a very high tick population and there is anecdotal evidence of the presence of Lyme's disease.

The increase in popularity in mountain biking will undoubtedly mean that existing routes will be more heavily used, and new routes could crop up. Pro-active engagement with the mountain bikers who are using the routes would help to minimise ground damage. As these tracks are originating from Abriachan Forest Trust, this is another collaborative project to discuss to have a joined up approach to managing this when it does become an issue.

Factors Causing Change

Anticipating an increase in more rainfall, and coming in more extreme bouts, water on the paths together with an anticipated increase in the number of people using the site would require a higher specification path network that is more expensive and labour intensive to manage.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

Abriachan Wood will provide an extensive area of quiet informal recreation to a wide range of users both from the local community and from further afield. The use of the site by tourists will be promoted through positive relationships with neighbouring tourist destination sites, with good signage and interpretation.

Entrances and signage will have a welcoming appearance and there will be a network of well-maintained paths providing a range of linear and loop routes with viewpoints over Loch Ness suitable for walkers, horse riders and cyclists, and where possible linking to the surrounding path network. Interpretation and waymarking that is fully integrated with, or compliments (where appropriate), Abriachan Forest Trust, and compliments that of the Great Glen Way, will provide visitors with information on routes and points of interest.

The use of the site for education will have increased through working closely with Abriachan Forest Trust, FCS Rural Skills, John Muir Award, Developing the Young Workforce, and other such initiatives.

Where appropriate, local business and cooperatives will be supported through the provision of available timber, as a bi-product of management work such as tree safety or coppicing, to assist in the manufacturing of local products that will have an attachment to the Woodland Trust.

An increase in the involvement of volunteers would be considered through the work programme.

Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)

Access provision will be in keeping with WT access guidelines. Achieved by:

- a) Ensuring that entrances & signage are welcoming to visitors and well cared for (annually).
- b) Ensuring that all managed paths are kept well-drained and free from encroaching vegetation by strimming, and that access features (e.g. bridges, steps, entrances, boundary features, etc. are kept in good order (annually).
- c) Ensuring that all viewpoints are maintained free of encroaching vegetation, where it is obscuring the view (annually).
- d) Ensuring that the site is kept safe and welcoming by: repair of vandalism (when needed); clearing of fallen trees where access is obstructed (as needed); and regular site safety surveys (as per risk assessment).

The visitor welcome & experience will be further enhanced by the following path network improvements:

- To upgrade the 240m of path from the viewpoint bench below the Corriefoyness track up to the

track in 2019.

- To improve the walking surface of 2.2km of the network (coffin trail and low level trail, where appropriate, through clearing cross drains, replacing small culvert pipes with open drain or larger pipes, improving the surfaces of the non grass path routes and removing obstacles. This work would be done in 2020 to coincide with the installation of the benches.
- Install an additional three benches along the path route, and manage the view at each of them, from the Clansman to the viewpoint to give rest and viewpoint opportunities. This would be planned to happen in 2020.
- For the path route below the viewpoint, allow this desire line to develop and consider infrastructure and safety implications on this route annually, particularly if use increases (ongoing).

Visitors will be attracted to the wood and informed about walks and points of interest by the following improvements in interpretation:

- To develop a leaflet that also includes the nearby Woodland Trust sites of Urquhart Bay and Balmcaan by the end of 2018.
- To improve the web based information by the end of 2018.
- To replace the two orientation and interpretation panels at the Clansman and Abriachan Gardens. Achieved by working in partnership with Abriachan Forest Trust and the neighbouring landowners by the end of 2020.
- Replace the orientation and interpretation panel at the Corriefoyness entrance in partnership with Abriachan Forest Trust and Great Glen Way Rangers by the end of 2020.
- To install waymarkers and signage to inform and educate visitors by the end of 2019.

We will engage with local business and with visitors by:

- Following infrastructure improvements, work with Local businesses and tourist destinations to hold leaflets and display posters and to provide information to staff that can be used when talking to tourists once leaflets are designed and printed.
- Provide information to Jacobite tours and cruises to allow them to chat with tourists with confidence and a good level of information about the woodland, nearby Woodland Trust sites and recreational opportunities there, alongside the new leaflet.
- Follow up opportunities to involve people in volunteering activities and hold a Volunteer work party day annually if interest exists.
- Encourage use of the site for outdoor learning by working with Abriachan Forest Trust. Contact local schools with Outdoor Learning pack, tree packs and Green Tree Schools award information once every five years.

6.0 WORK PROGRAMME

Year	Type of Work	Description	Due By
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APPENDIX 1: COMPARTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Key Features Present	Designations
1a	44.67	Open ground	2017	Min-intervention	No/poor vehicular access to the site, Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc	Connecting People with woods & trees	
<p>Moderate to steep, south to southeast facing slopes ranging from approximately 200m to 400m. This compartment has some very steep, southeast facing cliffs, large rocky outcrops and scree slopes (c. 25% of compartment area) which run almost the full length of the hillside between approximately 150m and 250m. The compartment is dominated by <i>Calluna vulgaris</i> and <i>Erica cinerea</i> heathland which varies with underlying changes in soil conditions to form a complex mosaic, grading from dry heath on the well drained areas to wet heath where hollows occur in the landscape. Tree cover is limited to small areas of birch (NVC W17) within the surrounding heathland and some fairly large but scattered areas of regenerating Scots pine and silver birch, and occasional regenerating rowan. Silver birch regeneration is gradually encroaching from the lower margin of the compartment. On the upper southwestern slopes at 300 to 350m, there is a large area of Bearberry heathland that has probably been retained due to regular heather burning in the past. Two large areas of juniper are present in southwest corner. Open ground habitats, rock, and scree make up c. 80% of the compartment area towards the southern end, where there is a an area of dominant gorse.</p>							
1b	54.65	Birch (downy/silver)	2017	Min-intervention	Gullies/Deep Valleys/Uneven/Rocky ground, No/poor vehicular access to the site	Connecting People with woods & trees	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland

Moderate to steep (occasionally very steep) southeast facing slope with some rocky outcrops and scree slopes. An extensive area of very open birch woodland dominated by bracken with young and semi-mature silver birch in places, particularly in gullies, with occasional oak and pine, and a small area of hazel at the southern end. The ground-flora is particularly grassy, and herb-rich. Bracken is abundant throughout the vast majority of this compartment and is overbearingly dominant in patches. Narrow Leaved Helleborine has been recorded in this compartment. This type of woodland (NVC W11c) is typical of eastern Scotland and is characteristically very open (typically c. 60% tree cover). It is likely that there was a higher proportion oak historically, which has been removed, allowing the birch to become dominant. The area was grazed by sheep prior to Woodland Trust acquisition. Open ground habitats, rock and scree make up c. 35% of the compartment. This compartment runs parallel to the A82 and Loch Ness. In 2002 a significant landslide occurred along this section, closing the A82. Netting was subsequently installed by BEAR Scotland to stabilise the bank. Virtually the whole of this compartment is recorded as Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) on the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI).

2a	27.30	Mixed broadleaves	2017	Min-intervention	No/poor vehicular access within the site, Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc	Connecting People with woods & trees	Ancient Woodland Site
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Linear compartment running parallel to the A82 and Loch Ness. On the moderate southeast facing slope in the north and south section of the sub-compartment are extensive areas of hazel woodland (NVC W9b). Past coppice management is likely to have favoured hazel over other tree species typical of this community, such as ash. Some of the hazel, particularly towards the northern end of the compartment are veterans of >100 years old. There has been extensive regeneration of new shoots throughout the hazel stands, since 1970-80 when stock was excluded from the site under Forestry Commission ownership (Coppins & Coppins 2001). Silver birch and ash standards are present throughout. There are occasional large stands of pure silver birch and pure alder, especially at lower levels. In the more open areas, individual semi-mature aspen, wych elm, rowan, silver birch, bird cherry, goat willow and hawthorn are present, with rare oak towards the northern end of the compartment. The ground-flora is quite lush, and in areas of flushing, or alongside burns, becomes rich and diverse. The characteristic dominant throughout is False brome. The lichen flora is rich and abundant, particularly on hazel. A total of 87 notable taxa have been recorded on hazel including two nationally rare, one nationally scarce and one vulnerable red data book species (*Lecidea erythrophaea*). A hazel supporting *Pyrenula occidentalis*, a nationally scarce 'old woodland' lichen has been tagged at NH566341 adjacent to the path and is potentially vulnerable to path maintenance works. Six notable species have been recorded from two oak trees at the north end of the cmpt including one nationally scarce, two nationally rare and one vulnerable Red Data Book species (*Schismatomma graphidiodes*)(Coppins & Coppins 2001). Scattered blocks of exotic conifer on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) totalling approx. 2ha were felled to waste in 2000 and are returning to a semi natural composition through processes of natural regeneration and some enrichment planting carried out in 2003 and 2015. Virtually the whole of this compartment is recorded as Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) on the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI).

2b	38.04	Open ground	2017	Min-intervention	No/poor vehicular access within the site, Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc	Connecting People with woods & trees	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland
<p>Mainly steep southeast facing slope with some rocky outcrops and scree slopes supporting an extensive area of open woodland dominated by mature silver birch (NVC W 11c). At higher elevations this becomes increasingly open and heathy (NVC W 17). It is likely that this woodland was originally an oak/birch community and that the oak has been removed allowing the birch to become dominant. Other species present include mature individual oak and ash with occasional alder, hazel, rowan, holly, hawthorn and goat willow. Juniper is frequent near the upper (west) boundary of the compartment. Small areas of gorse are present. Scattered blocks of exotic conifer totalling approx. 13ha (and including c. 3ha PAWS) were felled to waste in 2000 and are returning to a semi natural composition through processes of natural regeneration and enrichment planting carried out in 2003-04 and 2015. Bracken cover has developed in the larger of these open areas, particularly towards the northern end of the compartment. Where bracken is absent, the flora is predominately mixed grasses and a moderately rich ancient woodland flora, grading into dry heath at higher elevations. Birds Nest Orchid has been recorded in this compartment. Approximately 1/3 of this compartment along its lower (Eastern) boundary is recorded as Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) on the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI).</p>							

GLOSSARY

Ancient Woodland

Ancient woods are defined as those where there has been continuous woodland cover since at least 1600 AD. In Scotland ancient woods are defined strictly as sites shown as semi-natural woodland on the 'Roy' maps (a military survey carried out in 1750 AD, which is the best source of historical map evidence) and as woodland all subsequent maps. However, they have been combined with long-established woods of semi-natural origin (originating from between 1750 and 1860) into a single category of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland to take account of uncertainties in their identification. Ancient woods include Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland and plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (see below). May support many species that are only found in ancient woodland.

Ancient Semi - Natural Woodland

Stands in ancient woods defined as those consisting predominantly of native trees and shrubs that have not obviously been planted, which have arisen from natural regeneration or coppice regrowth.

Ancient Woodland Site

Stands in ancient woods that have been converted to plantations, of coniferous, broadleaved or mixed species, usually for timber production, including plantations of native species planted so closely together that any semi-natural elements of the understorey have been suppressed.

Beating Up

Replacing any newly planted trees that have died in the first few years after planting.

Broadleaf

A tree having broad leaves (such as oak) rather than needles found on conifers (such as Scots pine).

Canopy

The uppermost layer of vegetation in a woodland, or the upper foliage and branches of an individual tree.

Clearfell

Felling of all trees within a defined area.

Compartment

Permanent management division of a woodland, usually defined on site by permanent features such as roads. See Sub-compartments.

Conifer

A tree having needles, rather than broadleaves, and typically bearing cones.

Continuous Cover forestry

A term used for managing woods to ensure that there are groups or individual trees of different ages scattered over the whole wood and that some mature tree cover is always maintained. Management is by repeated thinning and no large areas are ever completely felled all at once.

Coppice

Trees which are cut back to ground levels at regular intervals (3-25 years).

Exotic (non-native) Species

Species originating from other countries (or other parts of the UK) that have been introduced by humans, deliberately or accidentally.

Field Layer

Layer of small, non-woody herbaceous plants such as bluebells.

Group Fell

The felling of a small group of trees, often to promote natural regeneration or allow planting.

Long Term Retention

Discrete groups of trees (or in some cases single trees) that are retained significantly past their economic felling age. Operations may still be carried out within them and thinning is often necessary to maintain stability.

Minimum Intervention

Areas where no operations (such as thinning) will take place other than to protect public safety or possibly to control invasive exotic species.

Mixed Woodland

Woodland made up of broadleaved and coniferous trees.

National vegetation classification (NVC)

A classification scheme that allows an area of vegetation to be assigned to the standardised type that best matches the combination of plant species that it contains. All woodlands in the UK can be described as being one of 18 main woodland types (W1 - W18), which principally reflect soil and climatic conditions. For example, Upland Oakwoods are type W11, and normally occur on well drained infertile soils in the cooler and wetter north and west of Britain. Each main type can be subdivided into numerous subtypes. Most real woods contain more than one type or sub-type and inevitably some woods are intermediate in character and can't be properly described by any sub type.

Native Species

Species that arrived in Britain without human assistance.

Natural Regeneration

Naturally grown trees from seeds falling from mature trees. Also regeneration from coppicing and suckering.

Origin & Provenance

The provenance of a tree or seed is the place where seed was collected to grow the tree or plant. The origin is the geographical location within the natural range of a species from where seeds/tree originally derives. Thus an acorn collected from a Turkey oak in Edinburgh would have an Edinburgh provenance and a southern European origin.

Re-Stocking

Re-planting an area of woodland, after it has been felled.

Shrub Layer

Formed by woody plants 1-10m tall.

Silviculture

The growing and care of trees in woodlands.

Stand

Trees of one type or species, grouped together within a woodland.

Sub-Compartment

Temporary management division of a compartment, which may change between management plan periods.

Thinning

The felling of a proportion of individual trees within a given area. The remaining trees grow to fill in the space created.

Tubex or Grow or Tuley Tubes

Tubes placed over newly planted trees or natural regeneration that promote growth and provide protection from animals such as rabbits and deer.

Weeding

The control of vegetation immediately around newly planted trees or natural regeneration to promote tree growth until they become established. Either by hand cutting or with carefully selected weed killers such as glyphosate.

Windblow/Windthrow

Trees or groups of trees blown over (usually uprooted) by strong winds and gales.