

Environmental Standard Operating Procedure 4

Tree & Scrub Removal on Fens



Trees and scrub provide important habitats for a wide range of species. Sympathetic management of these areas has a positive effect on **European Protected Species** including bats and otters. Breeding birds, amphibians and reptiles are also commonly associated with trees and scrub and are at risk from unsympathetic management. As such many species associated with trees/scrub are protected by law under **The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**. Within fen habitat, if left unmanaged, scrub can quickly invade and change the habitat to one dominated by woody species. Selective management is therefore required to maintain a mosaic of open fen with a proportion of scrub and trees present.

Aim

To maintain fen habitat in an open condition through the selective management of trees and scrub whilst avoiding killing, injuring or disturbing a species protected by law, and the destruction of its habitat. Achieve a balance of habitats whereby open fen is maintained with a proportion of scrub of mixed ages retained for its intrinsic value.

Environmental Risk

Impact	Likelihood	Mitigation
Disturbance, killing & injury of Protected Species, including bat, otter, water vole & breeding birds.	High	See ESOPs 10-14; & Standard Procedure / Delivery Method below



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Tree & Scrub Habitats

Trees (particularly mature trees) support a wide variety of wildlife providing habitat for invertebrates, birds, roosting sites for bats and shelter for otters. In habitats adjacent to open water (dykes and ponds), willow emerald damselflies *Chalcolestes viridis* lay their eggs in young alders and willows.

Scrub (open & closed) will also be used by a variety of species, offering cover, shade and nesting opportunities. Scrub close to sunny basking areas is important for amphibians and reptiles.

Trees and scrub overhanging water provide refuge and spawning grounds for fish. Overhanging branches are also used as feeding perches by birds like kingfishers, which can use root plates of upturned trees as nesting areas.

Some **Wet Woodland** communities are important at a European level and are protected as part of the designated site network.

A sustainable population of **Veteran/Ancient trees** ancient trees in the landscape is vital for the wildlife dependent on them.

Hedgerows are a BAP habitat, important for birds and invertebrates. Under the Hedgerows Regulations 1997, it is against the law to remove or destroy certain hedgerows without permission from the local planning authority.

Standard Procedure

- For sites with an agri-environment agreement, removal of scattered scrub from open fen should form part of the agreed management plan. Large scale scrub/tree removal may need separate consultation with Natural England;
- For designated sites outside of an agri-environment agreement, complete consultation with **Natural England** if clearance of scrub is on or within 100m of a statutory designated site e.g. SSSI, SAC, NNR;
- Complete consultation with **Forestry Commission** for licence requirements e.g. felling licence may be required if felling more than 5m³ per quarter with a diameter greater than 8cm at 1.3m height from the ground;
- Complete AqHerb01 Licence application with **Environment Agency** if treating stumps within 1m of water's edge;
- Complete Waste Exemption Registration form with Environment Agency from burning waste in the open;
- If within Planning Conservation Area or if trees have a Tree Preservation Order complete 'Application for Tree Works' form and send to **Planning Department**;
- Identify potential impacts on species and habitats in surrounding area & advise on mitigation;
- **TIMING** – Tree and scrub removal to be completed between **1st October to 28th February**. Breeding bird check must be completed if clearance works undertaken outside this window – See ESOP 13; and
- **See ESOP 27** for standard procedures specifically relevant to riverside trees.

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Delivery Method

- Forward plan for fen sites will identify areas for scrub clearance. These to be confirmed within work plan 8–12 months in advance;
- Site visit to be undertaken prior to works to ascertain any specific access or management conditions;
- One month prior to commencement of works, provide method statement/map taking account of any necessary mitigation or constraints, marking area to be managed;
- **Stumps** must be cut as close to ground level as possible to allow future cutting of cleared areas & where beneficial treated with Roundup ProActive 360/herbicide to prevent regrowth. Cuts to be made at a shallow angle to prevent injury to any grazing stock or wildlife walking over the area and reduce run of herbicide;
- **Burning** of cut wood and brash should not take place directly on the fen surface; tin sheets or fire sledge should be used and where possible situated on perimeter banks, with ash spread thinly and away from dyke edges unless otherwise specified.
- Fire sledge should be regularly moved to avoid heat scorching into the peat. Sledge should be moved using hand power winches where suitable trees are present or using the iron horse. The iron horse is a tracked vehicle and care should be taken to avoid tracking over the same ground and over very wet soft peat;
- **Stacking** of cut wood may be permitted and should be stacked neatly within existing wooded or shaded areas. Do not stack in open areas of vegetation; and
- Management to be monitored by EO during and after work.

Consultation Required

- **Broads Authority internal** – Environment Officers & Planning
- **External** – Landowners, Natural England, Forestry Commission and Environment Agency.

Further Information

Natural England – *The Scrub Management Handbook*

Natural England – [Veteran Trees Management Handbook](#)

Broads Authority– [Fen Audit – Supplement to the Fen Management Strategy](#)

Broads Authority – *River Corridor Tree and Scrub Management Guidance*