

# Environmental Standard Operating Procedure 27

## Riverside Tree & Scrub Removal

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. Tree roots and overhanging limbs provide significant cover for fish from predators, spawning and extreme temperatures in the summer months.

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**.



### Aim

To maintain navigation access so vessels can enjoy safe passage in the broads, through the selective management of trees and scrub along the river banks whilst avoiding killing, injuring or disturbing a species protected by law, and the destruction of its habitat.

### Environmental Risk

Impact	Likelihood	Mitigation
Disturbance, killing & injury of Protected Species, including bats, otters, water vole & breeding birds.	High	See ESOPs 10–14; & Standard Procedure / Delivery Method below
Removal of wooded habitat resulting in impacts upon shade and temperature along the river edge; direct impacts on habitat for fish.	High	Selective tree removal; Trees retained with roots in water; & Retention of 20% overhanging vegetation in any managed stretch

# Environmental Standard Operating Procedure 27

## Riverside Tree & Scrub Removal



### Tree & Scrub Habitats

**Trees** (particularly mature & veteran 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.

**Overhanging limbs and roots** in the 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.

### Standard Procedure

- For designated sites, complete consultation with **Natural England** if clearance of scrub is on or within 100m of a statutory designated site e.g. SSSI, SAC or NNR. Assent will be required from NE through the completion of a Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening form;
- Consultation with **Forestry Commission**: Exempt from a felling licence under The Forestry Act 1967 (as amended) for 'Felling trees obstructing

the works of statutory undertakers'. Permission received for tree management within a 3m zone from the river edge;

- Complete AqHerb01 Licence application with **Environment Agency** if treating stumps within 1m of water's edge or if the area floods;
- Complete WFD assessment with **Environment Agency** for riverside scrub clearance and Waste Exemption Registration form with Environment Agency for 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, survey & advise on mitigation;
- **TIMING** – Tree and scrub removal to be completed between **1st October & 28th February**. Breeding bird check must be completed if clearance works undertaken outside this window – see ESOP 13; and
- **See ESOP 4 for standard procedures specifically relevant to fen habitat.**

### Delivery Method

- Forward plan for riverbank sites will identify areas for tree & scrub clearance. These to be confirmed within work plan 5 months in advance;
- Site visit to be undertaken prior to works to ascertain any specific access or management conditions;
- Two weeks prior to commencement of works, provide method statement/map taking account of any necessary mitigation or constraints and marking area to be managed;
- **Stumps** must be cut as close to ground level as possible at a shallow angle to allow future cutting of cleared areas & where beneficial treated

# Environmental Standard Operating Procedure 27

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with Roundup ProActive 360/herbicide to prevent regrowth. Stumps with roots protruding into river left untreated;

- **Burning** of cut wood and brash should not take place directly on the bank surface; tin sheets or fire sledge should be used and where possible situated on perimeter banks, with ash spread thinly and away from water 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 cordwood in open areas of vegetation;
- Depending on location, brash can be stacked on bank edge to make barrier;
- **Ecological features** which are to be retained are mature/veteran trees, young trees for future mature specimens, trees with roots in the water and 20% over-hanging vegetation;
- **Selected trees to be felled using chainsaws or mechanical tree shears where appropriate.** Trees shears particularly suitable for clearing tree/scrub in and over the water and those within 1m of the river;
- When felling and cutting brash/cordwood, ensure timber does not fall into river, any material that falls into the water to be removed immediately to prevent causing a hazard for vessels; 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*