

# Environmental Standard Operating Procedure 25

## Fen Mowing

The Broads fens have unique and important plant communities, which in turn provide specialist habitat for many birds and invertebrates. Fen habitat requires periodic vegetation removal to keep it in an open and healthy condition and prevent scrub invasion; working practices aim to achieve this whilst avoiding damage to this sensitive habitat.

### Aim

To cut and remove herbaceous fen plant material, maintaining and/or restoring the fen to an open condition.



### Environmental Risk

Impact	Likelihood	Mitigation
Damage to vegetation community either through catastrophic removal of large areas of fen habitat in one operation, and/or cutting in inappropriate conditions	High	Sites to be split into smaller areas and cut on rotation. Uncut areas to be left within compartment for habitat continuity, where possible linking to other uncut areas at boundary/edge. Cutting to be timed to maximise seeding of flowering plants and avoid high water levels, especially if saw sedge present.
Removal of all invertebrate habitat	High	Uncut areas to be left within compartment for refuge. Amount & location will be site specific but should ensure maximum edge to cut area ratio. Can incorporate areas that would be difficult to cut.
Cutting or damaging tussocks	High	Raise cutting height and/or avoid tussocky areas
Disturbance to breeding birds	Med	Mowing timed to avoid majority of breeding season; operator checks and awareness of possible nest sites
Damage to fen substrate	High	Produce plan for site including track plan to avoid repeated tracking over same area; use of track mats and designated piling sites. Limit number of people walking over same area on soft peat sites and avoid operating in very wet conditions.

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### Standard Procedures – Hand Mowing

- Within a site, small areas to be cut on rotation to reduce catastrophic impacts from large scale vegetation removal.
- Uncut areas to be retained within the cut compartment, acting as refuge areas for invertebrates and small mammals.
- Vegetation to be cut and either stacked in rows for burning, or raked into habitat piles.
- Habitat piles to be situated on banks surrounding the fen and not within fen itself. Small piles can be left within the fen for invertebrates & birds.
- Bonfires should never be placed 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 insitu 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.
- When burning in rows, ground conditions should be wet to encourage a quick flash burn of cut material.
- Ensure breaks exist between cut and standing material to prevent fire from spreading. Good practice to have a water pump on site.
- Routine mowing to be avoided within the bird breeding season (April–July); good practice to check areas for nests before mowing. Mark locations of nests found and leave marked areas undisturbed.
- Areas with a high density of tussocks may require use of brushcutter so that tussocks can be avoided.

### Consultation Required

**External** – Natural England annual notification of routine work programme

### Standard Procedures – Fen Harvester

- Larger areas may be cut with the harvester owing to economies of scale, however, this should still only amount to a proportion of the site and not removal of all the vegetation in one season.
- Uncut areas to be retained within the cut compartment, to act as refuge areas for invertebrates and small mammals.
- Vegetation is cut and collected in the bin on the back of the harvester.
- Substrate damage can readily occur on wet soft sites; extreme care to be taken when turning the machine to avoid rutting and tearing the substrate.
- Operation of machine should be slow to ensure sensitivity. Very wet and soft areas should be avoided.
- Track mats to be used in areas where repeated tracking or turning is expected.
- Cut material will either be tracked off site to a disposal area or for re-use, or will be piled on site in pre-designated areas.
- Care to be taken when piling on site to ensure that piles do not extend beyond planned disposal area.
- Routine mowing to be avoided within the bird breeding season (April–July); good practice to check areas for nests before mowing. Mark locations of nests found and leave marked areas undisturbed.
- Areas with a high density of tussocks should be avoided; cutting height to be raised if tussocks scattered through fen.
- In the interests of best practice, the impacts of this machine will be monitored. This includes operator use of GPS machine and completion of a log book – guidance on these is provided in separate documentation.
- Site plan to be produced by Environment Officer detailing track plan, use of mats, designated piling sites and sensitive areas.

### Further Information

Broads Authority – Fen Management Strategy and Supplement

Fen Management Handbook – <http://www.snh.gov.uk/about-scotlands-nature/habitats-and-ecosystems/lochs-rivers-and-wetlands/fen/>