

Environmental Standard Operating Procedure

ESOP Name	Tree and scrub removal on fens
ESOP Number	4
Revision Date	22/02/2024
Related ESOPs	2 Biosecurity 13 Breeding bird mitigation 14 Bat mitigation for tree removal 15 Herbicide application 24 Oil and fuel use and storage on site



Aim

Trees and scrub provide important habitats for a wide range of species, many of which are afforded protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981). Sympathetic management of these areas has a positive impact for protected species including otters and bats. Poor management can result in habitat loss/degradation which can have far reaching impacts on the species reliant on tree and scrub habitat.

Left unmanaged, scrub can quickly invade and dominate fen habitat. The standard operating procedure therefore aims to maintain a mosaic of open fen habitat with a proportion of scattered trees and scrub through a selective management approach. Management should be sensitive and should not lead to the death, injury or disturbance of protected species or degradation of the habitat.

Standard Methodology

- Forward plan for fen sites will identify areas for scrub clearance, 5-10% scrub cover should be maintained on individual sites. 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. A stump grinder may be used where access is suitable.
- 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 an ecologist during and after work.

Procedure

Pre-works

- If the site is under an agri-environment agreement, the removal of scrub and trees should be part of the management plan and should be undertaken in line with this. Otherwise, scrub removal must be in line with the management plan for the site.
- An ecologist must check the site for protected species and specify the timing and extent of the works to be completed and direct any mitigation works that will need to be undertaken.

- Tree and scrub removal should **only** take place between 1st September and 28th February to avoid the breeding bird season. If any tree and scrub work is to be done outside of this window, the site must first be checked for breeding birds by an ecologist. If nesting activity is identified then works may not go ahead until the ecologist has confirmed that the nesting attempt has reached a natural conclusion.

Operational

- Any areas where protected species have been identified should be avoided unless specific mitigation has been put in place
- If any protected species are encountered then works must stop and the responsible ecologist must be notified immediately.
- A proportion of trees and scrub should be maintained as directed by the ecologist, and in line with the specific method statement for the task, as individual specimens provide rest places for birds and territorial singing perches.

Consultation

The following must be confirmed by the Ecology team before works commence:

- 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 or becomes flooded;
- 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

Risk Assessment

Hazard	Initial Risk			Controls / Safeguards / Precautions	Revised Risk		
	S	L	R		S	L	R
Disturbance/damage/loss of habitat	4	5	C	Selective management should be undertaken, leaving a proportion of the trees and scrub as directed by the method statement and responsible ecologist. Burning should always be undertaken on tin sheets which should be moved periodically to prevent damage to the site.	4	2	B
Loss of terrestrial habitat	4	5	C	Ensure that a proportion of trees and scrub are maintained; regularly review and update the site management plans to ensure that scrub management remains appropriate and proportional for the site.	4	1	B
Disturbance or death of protected species	4	4	C	Pre-works protected species and bird surveys, appropriate mitigation to displace protected species if necessary.	4	2	B

Matrix

		LIKELIHOOD				
		Very unlikely	Unlikely	Moderately likely	Likely	Very likely
SEVERITY		1	2	3	4	5
Low (minimal, short-term disturbance levels and negligible damage to native habitats.)	1	A	A	A	A	A
Medium (moderate, short-term disturbance levels, some damage to native habitats/species. Regenerates quickly.)	2	A	A	A	B	B
High (high disturbance levels over a longer period and displacement of species. Damage to native habitats. Significant time to regenerate)	3	A	B	B	C	C
Very High (Long-term disturbance with displacement/death of species. Significant damage to native habitats that takes a significant time to regenerate.)	4	B	B	C	C	C

RISK	
A	OK. Work to provisions in risk assessment
B	Proceed with caution. Dynamically review risks.
C	Cancel task. Approach project in a different way.