

WOODLAND GRAZING IN THE WEST HIGHLANDS

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Rationale

There has been increasing interest in the use of stock grazing to encourage natural regeneration and to enhance the biodiversity of native woodlands. Following the CAP review, there is the possibility that new EU funding may become available for conservation grazing within woodlands. The need for greater understanding and more guidance on this issue is however urgently needed. It is anticipated that the findings from this project will play a vital role in informing this process.

Aims of this partnership project are to:

- Co-ordinate current examples of woodland grazing by livestock in the West Highlands.
- Develop a woodland grazing 'toolkit' for use by agency staff, advisers and practitioners
- Work up typical costs of conservation grazing to feed into SFGS Standard Costs or other incentives to be developed.
- Set up a newsletter as a means of disseminating best practice.
- Hold a Woodland Grazing Conference, aimed at practitioners and advisers.

Preliminary work has been undertaken during 2003/4 to establish the demand for, and requirements of, the main part of the project. Work in 2004/5 will deliver the major outputs, such as the field trials and educational seminar.

Main Project

1. **Woodland Grazing Newsletter.** The first edition of the newsletter will highlight recent relevant events, such as the Woodland Grazing Workshop and progress on the West Highlands project.

2. Field-based review of the current woodland grazing activity to establish:

- Best practice for conservation grazing - seasons, numbers etc. of livestock as well as feeding arrangements, water, fencing, access
- Actual and estimated total costs per ha per year.
- The range of different objectives and benefits of conservation grazing.
- How forestry (or other) grants were organised - LEAP, FWP etc.
- Whether provision of advice to the farmer or grazier is adequate and how this can be improved.

3. Woodland Grazing Toolkit Field Trials. Following the field-based review, trial sites will be set up in which to pilot the concept of a Woodland Grazing Toolkit. The trial sites would demonstrate what a Toolkit would encompass. The sites will be identified and established in consultation with the owners/managers, FC and SNH. This work will be developed into a woodland grazing 'toolkit' for use by agency staff, advisers and practitioners.

Before the end of 2004, the results from this review and field trials could inform the process of developing a stewardship grant for conservation grazing within SFGS, RSS or LMCs. The review would produce costs for woodland grazing for input into the grant, as well as a selection of best practice case studies. The field trials would demonstrate whether the Toolkit would be a practical and effective way of organising a grazing grant.

4. Woodland Grazing Conference. To be held in March 2005, this event would bring together all the current research and knowledge on woodland grazing. The event would also raise the level of awareness of advisers and practitioners about conservation grazing. This in turn would greatly aid in the delivery of conservation benefits within woodlands if and when grazing becomes a grant-aidable management option under SFGS and other grants e.g. RSS Wood Pasture.

Project management

This project operates under the umbrella of the Argyll & Bute Biodiversity Partnership. The steering group includes members of the partnership who are able to contribute to the delivery of the project. Lucy Sumsion (Argyll FWAG, Farm Conservation Adviser) is currently acting as Project Coordinator.

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