

Highland *Rhododendron ponticum* Control Strategy 2011 – 2013

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1. Summary

The aim of this Control Strategy is to tackle the spread of *Rhododendron ponticum* and its hybrids throughout Highland through effective treatment. The control strategy sets out a robust framework for identifying the priorities that govern control work for the benefit of owners, agents and government officers preparing and assessing proposals for rhododendron clearance, including those for the National Forest Estate. It recognises that complete eradication of rhododendron from the region is a long term goal which may not be achievable. What is achievable in the short term is local eradication on smaller, isolated sites and the containment and control of the current infestations on larger sites.

Prioritisation criteria has been developed to identify geographic zones where the actual cost of treating privately owned sites will be approved within the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP); it is believed that applying these criteria to encourage treatment will best achieve national and international targets in the short to medium term.

2. Aim

To help stop the spread of *Rhododendron ponticum* (R.p) and its hybrids in, and adjacent to, woodlands in Highland and reduce its area and distribution. The SRDP-Rural Priorities funding stream will provide the main mechanism for achieving this.

3. Current National and Regional Policy

The Biodiversity Strategy of Scotland sets out a medium to long term vision to halt and reverse loss of biodiversity. One of its aims is that “*The spread of invasive non-native species will have been slowed or halted, and specific areas, regions or islands will have been designated as free from some invasive and non-native species.*”

In response to this:

- The Biodiversity Strategy and the Species Action Framework, produced by SNH, recognise that the impact of non-native invasive species on native woodlands can be severe and quickly become uncontrollable and that we need to guard against these threats, and manage them carefully when they arise.
- The Scottish Forestry Strategy Key Theme 7 (Biodiversity) also supports both targeted action for woodland and woodland related priority species, and habitats and broad actions at a landscape/ecosystem scale.

- At a regional level the Highland Invasive Species Forum has identified *Rhododendron* as one of its 5 key Invasive Species for control.
- Forest Enterprise Scotland has produced a Control Strategy for the treatment of *rhododendron* on the National Forest Estate over the next 15 years.

4. Prioritisation

Although the extent of *R.p* cover throughout Highland has yet to be determined, it is reasonable to assume that total eradication from the region would be a very costly undertaking. At present, eradication work is supported through the SRDP via the competitive Rural Priorities funding mechanism. The need to best use these limited resources in order to minimise spread and ultimately eradicate *R.p* on a landscape scale and eliminate the risk to threatened habitats and species, provides the impetus to prioritise sites for control. A common framework would be of benefit to land owners, agents and government agency staff involved in the preparation and assessment of proposals to the SRDP.

In setting criteria for prioritisation, the following general principles and assumptions have been noted: the predominance of designated sites; control should focus on preventing invasion and removing seed sources (Edwards and Taylor (2008)).

Sites have therefore been ranked as follows:

Prioritisation Criteria for <i>R.p.</i> Control in Highland
1. Geographic treatment zones focussed on designated sites (SAC / SSSI / SPA) in unfavourable or declining condition due to <i>R.p</i>, and favourable sites at risk from, <i>R.p.</i>, including adjacent affected land.
2. Ancient and native woodlands, adjacent land and non-native woodlands within a treatment zone which hold perpetual seed sources.
3. Non-designated sites which support vulnerable or threatened bryophytes and lichens.
4. Gardens and Designed Landscapes.
5. Any site affected by <i>Phytophthora</i> spp. outbreak.

The spread of *Phytophthora spp* is recognised as a significant threat to UK plant health. In the event of an outbreak in Highland, these sites would automatically be given priority

irrespective of the Prioritisation Criteria but cannot be geographically indicated within the scope of this Strategy.

Japanese larch has also been identified as a host species for *Phytophthora*. Where there is a significant *R.p.* presence under Japanese larch, removal may be a priority.

Applying these criteria, woodland sites (where open ground is less than 20%) within the following zones will be eligible for either standard costs or up to 100% actual cost through the SRDP (2007-2013) Rural Priorities Landscape Priority HIG14 options. All other woodland will be eligible for standard costs only.

Priority Treatment Zones in Highland (Appendix 1)

- 1. Wester Ross**
- 2. Skye & Lochalsh**
- 3. West Lochaber**
- 4. Moray Firth**

This Strategy will support work on land adjacent to the National Forest Estate and seeks to strengthen and encourage collaboration between the private and public sector. In geographically contiguous blocks under fragmented land ownership, aspirations for treating neighbouring seed bearing stands should be evaluated prior to a treatment timetable being fixed. Proposals should be brought forward to avoid re-infestation following treatment and this should be reflected by the treatment timetable

5. Delivering the Strategy

The Highland Rhododendron Strategy is supported by Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, Highland Council and Highland Invasive Species Forum.

The Strategy will be implemented by Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, Highland Council and the Highland Rhododendron Project. The work plan of the Highland Rhododendron Project officer will be tied to the delivery of the Strategy.

6. Reviewing the Strategy

This Strategy will inform the eligibility of sites for actual and standard costs through the SRDP (2011-2013). At the end of this period, it will be necessary to review this document in line with any subsequent funding stream.

7. References

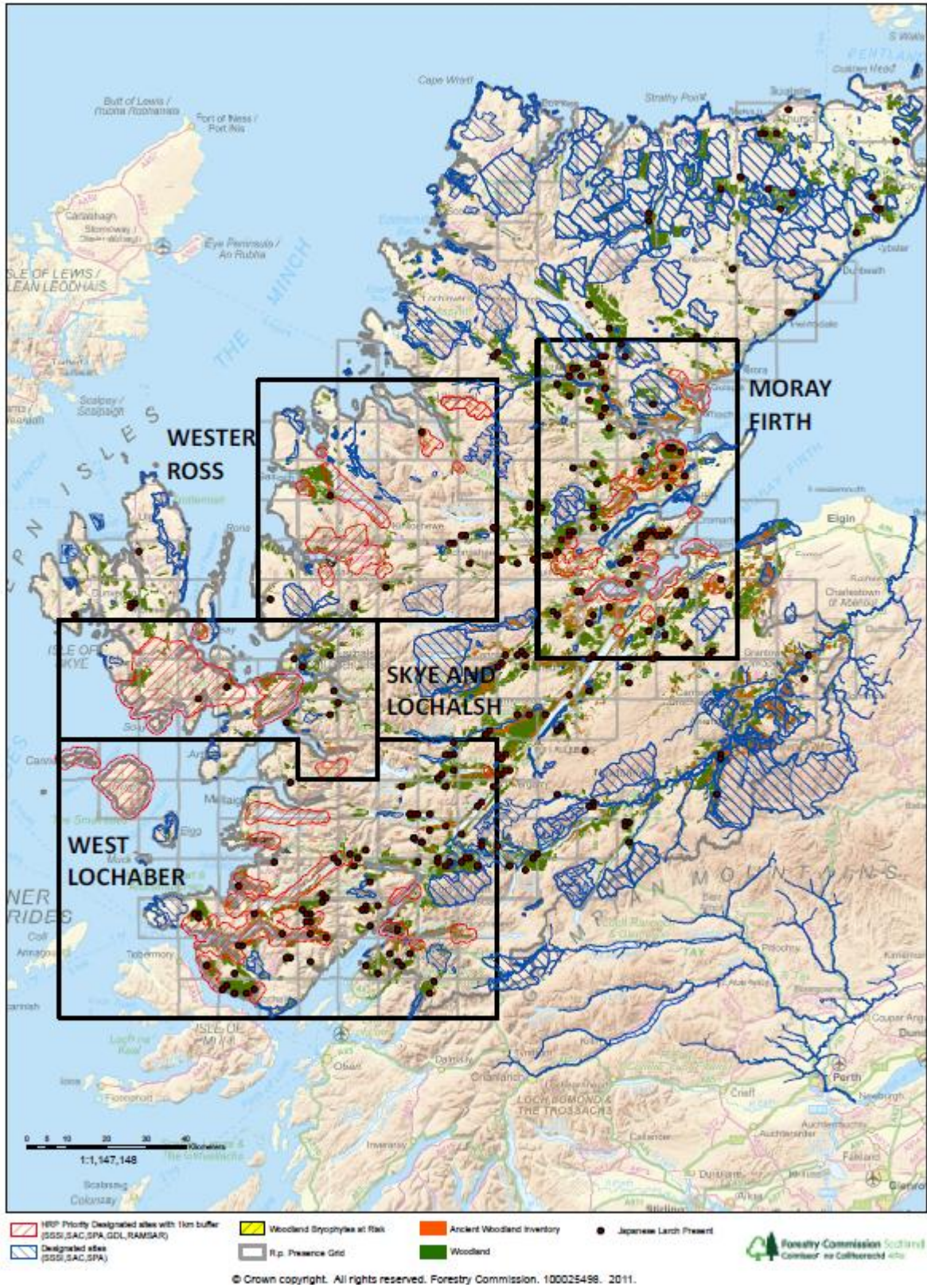
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Last Revision: 10th October 2011

Appendix 1: Priority Treatment Zones in Highland

HIGHLAND RHODODENDRON PONTICUM CONTROL STRATEGY
PRIORITY TREATMENT ZONES 2011-2013



Additional Information:

HRP Priority Designated Sites: SSSI, SAC, SPA, GDL and RAMSAR sites affected by R.p.

Designated sites: SSSI, SAC and SPAs which are not currently significantly affected by R,p but may be at risk.

R.p. Presence Grid: R.p. recorded at one or more location within each 10km square

Ancient Woodland Inventory: Ancient woods of Semi-Natural Origin (ASNO) and Long-Established woods of Plantation Origin (LEPO) sites

Woodland: All other woodland cover

Japanese larch: Indicative of significant larch plantations