

Rothiemurchus Forest Plan 5-Yearly Update 2025

Long-term Forest Plan 2026-2045:

Our forest plan is guided by Scotland's Forestry Strategy, a framework aiming to sustainably increase forest cover to meet economic, environmental and social goals. This strategy promotes planting "the right tree, in the right place, for the right purpose", to manage forests sustainably and build resilience against climate change. Key elements include increasing woodland area, enhancing biodiversity, and integrating forestry with other land uses. Forest plans are developed using templates and resources provided by Scottish Forestry to guide forest management activities.

The establishment of an on-going long-term forest plan started in 2006; based on the "Framework for Management of Rothiemurchus Pinewoods" and the "Rothiemurchus Biodiversity Action Plan" prepared by Dr. Phil Ratcliffe.

Rothiemurchus woodlands have historically been managed for timber, woodland grazing, deer stalking, nature conservation and amenity; some areas have been consistently wooded since the last ice-age 8,000 years ago; without modification by drainage or ploughing and with one generation of trees succeeding another by natural regeneration.

The forest plan covers 1,876 hectares (ha), within which the wooded area currently covers 1,300 ha, of which 953ha is within a 2021-2025 Forestry Grant Scheme native woodland management contract. The woodlands are characterised under the following habitat types:

- 881 ha Scots pine, birch, juniper
- 209 ha conifer plantation
- 72 ha bog woodland
- 43 ha riparian woodland (Rothiemurchus stretches 8km along the river Spey and straddles the River Druidh for part of its length)
- 35 ha lowland broadleaf
- 29 ha policy woodland (woodlands managed for landscape near Inverdruidh House and the Doune of Rothiemurchus)
- 16 ha scrub (juniper & some whins)
- 10 ha oak/birch
- 4 ha montane woodland

The remaining forest plan area (577 ha) includes open water, clearings and land tending to regenerate to woodland. The woodlands are significant as habitat for capercaillie, wood ants, narrow headed ant, Scottish cross bill, crested tit, intermediate winter green, twinflower, black grouse, osprey, otter, beaver, badger, wild cat, red and roe deer, fungi, lichens and bryophytes. Much of the woodland is within Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Conservation Areas (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA).

Forest Plan Aims & Objectives:

At least 60% will be managed as native woodland & that this area is regenerating, has high structural & age-class diversity & is delivering ecological functions appropriate for biodiversity action plan targets and maintaining designated areas in favourable condition.

The forest is enjoyed by thousands of visitors and supports sustainable livelihoods. Management will be compliant with the UK Forestry Standard.

Habitat Management categories:

Management interventions, such as thinning and clear-felling will vary according to the following habitat management categories:

- Core Old Growth (minimum intervention, removal of non-native species, retention of all dead-wood): 122ha
- Extension old growth (areas where management intervention can enhance old growth characteristics): 270ha
- Extended rotation woodland (trees retained beyond their commercial rotation age, thinning and felling aimed at increasing structural diversity. These areas will help connect old growth areas across the forest): 591ha
- Timber Production (areas where the priority will be on sustainable timber production, with low impact harvesting systems used in native woodland areas and clear felling an option within plantation areas): 161ha in plantation woodlands, 174ha of native woodlands.
- Policy woodland (areas associated with the built environment and 'designed' landscapes): 45ha
- Bog woodland (no intervention): 163ha
- Woodland expansion (open, largely hill ground that is slowly regenerating to woodland): 464ha
- Woodland grazing (farm woodlands, mainly native species): 72ha
- Other land (roads, yards, etc): 18ha

Timber harvesting proposals:

Thinning to produce useable timber will take place within most of the areas of extended rotation woodland, timber production and policy woodlands where and when it is economically viable.

The northern part of the Ord Ban plantation is estimated to be felled towards 2030, and replanted with Sitka spruce, with a component of birch. The Douglas fir element of the Callart plantation is also planned to be felled towards 2030 and replanted with Sitka spruce.

Forest roads:

To facilitate woodland management, 1km of rough track is planned to be upgraded to forest road in the Moormore area. 202m of rough track is planned to be upgraded to forest road, with a turning area, in the Callart Plantation. 50m of forest road and turning area is planned to be made along an old access track in the Blackpark area.

Public Access:

The existing provision for public access paths and activities will be maintained and up-graded as required.

Wildlife and nature:

The forest plan refers to the SSSI/SAC and SPA management plans. Woodland grazing with cattle, retention of deadwood, control of deer numbers, careful planning of timber harvesting operations and management for public access will be implemented to benefit habitats for wildlife and support populations of capercaillie, black grouse, red squirrel, beaver, wild cat, twinflower, aspen and other priority species.

Wild Deer management

The principle aim for deer management in the forest plan is to secure woodland regeneration whilst delivering income from venison sales and client stalking.

Historic Environment

Much of the archaeological record of Rothiemurchus has already been identified and mapped and features will be protected from damage during forest operations. Trees growing on built structures will be carefully removed. Operations within Scheduled Ancient Monument and Designed Landscape designations will be

agreed with Historic Environment Scotland. Previously unrecorded features will be reported to the regional archaeologist.

Addendum; a summary of why Rothiemurchus is special:

- Total extent: 7,435 hectares
- 'High ground' area covers 5,007 hectares that reaches the summit of Braeriach at 1296m.
- 'Low ground' area covers 2,428 hectares from 210m above mean sea level on the River Spey to 450m on Pityoulish hill and 500m on Kennapole hill.
- EU Habitats and Species Directive Natura 2000 sites cover 6,121 hectares (Cairngorms SAC & SPA & River Spey SAC, also Cairngorms Massif SPA).
- Four Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) cover 6,135 hectares (82% of the total estate area) (Cairngorms, Northern Corries, North Rothiemurchus Pinewoods and River Spey).
- 100% within the Cairngorms National Park.
- 100% within the Cairngorms National Scenic Area.
- Loch Einich & Loch Coire an Lochan within the Cairngorm Lochs Ramsar site (A Ramsar Site is a wetland site designated of international importance under the 1971 UNESCO Convention on Wetlands, known as the Ramsar Convention.)
- Recorded archaeological sites total 158; 4 of which are Scheduled Ancient Monuments.
- Doune Designed Landscape covers 522 hectares.
- Naturally regenerating native woodland (native pine/birch/juniper) covers 1,063 hectares, including 3.9 hectares of montane woodland / montane scrub, 58 hectares of bog woodland (muskeg) with an additional 577 hectares of open ground for gradual, long-term regeneration to forest.
- Conifer plantation covers 209 hectares, most of which is native species.
- Designated core paths extend to 20.5 kilometres with an additional 2.3km of waymarked path and 1.2km of promoted hill path.
- In 1976 the Ranger Service was Scotland's first to be established on a private estate, and is still going strong today.
- Recorded bird species total 173.
- Recorded mammal species total 28.
- Approximately 150 wild red deer and perhaps 100 roe deer; a population level that enables woodland regeneration targets to be met.
- An estimated 300,000 to 380,000 day visits per year by members of the public.
- Visitor activities (as set out on our website www.rothie.co.uk), retail outlets and visitor accommodation contribute financially to the care of the environment.
- Employed staff (full-time equivalent) number 30 to 40 supported by 10 to 20 seasonal staff and other staff employed by partner visitor activity businesses.