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Scoping Report

Upper Sonachan Long Term Forest Plan

Prepared by: Eric Roberts

Tilhill Forestry Ltd.

Tel 01631 562 906

This document contains important information from the proposed Long-Term Forest Plan for Upper Sonachan.

Consultees are asked to respond by **31/03/2025** with any comments or currently unidentified key issues to:

Eric Roberts
Tilhill Forestry
Suite 4 Malin House
European Marine Science Park
Dunbeg
Oban
PA37 1SZ

ConsultationWHN@tilhill.com

Email Subject: Upper Sonachan Consultation

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1. Description of Forest and Plan Outline.

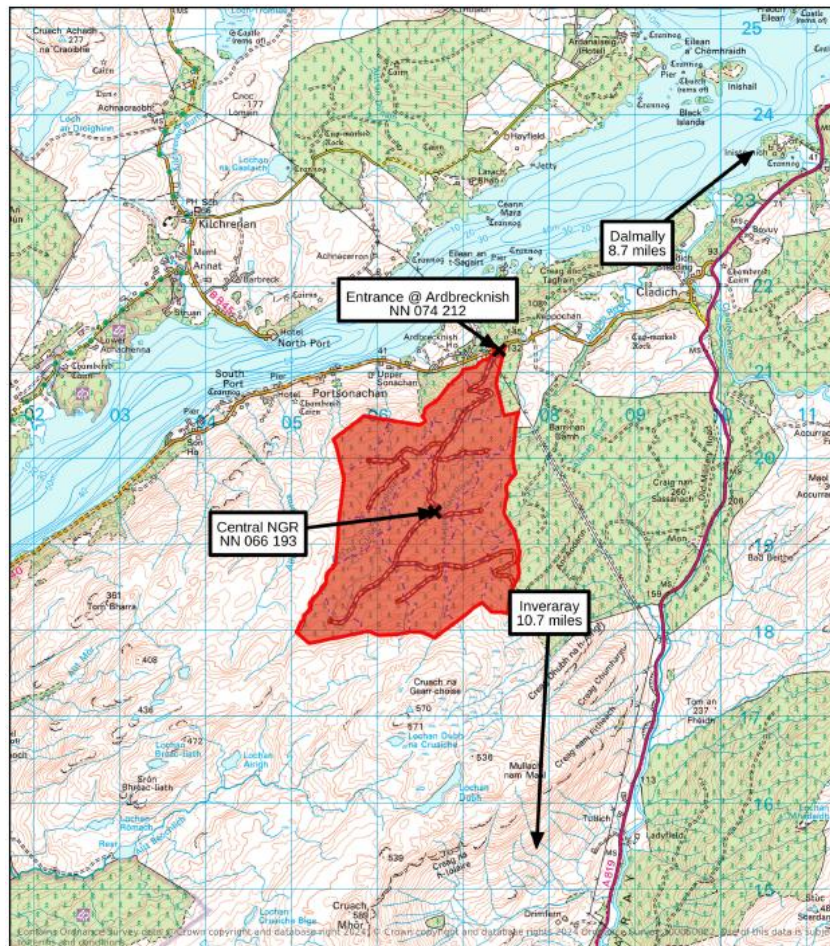
Upper Sonachan is a 555.10 hectare forest which forms part of the wider Cladich forest complex. It is situated beside the small settlement of Ardbrecknish, 1.7 miles from Cladich, 8.7 miles from Dalmally and 10.7 miles from Inveraray.

The forest was first planted in 1981/82 with a primary objective of timber production. To this end, the dominant planted crop was, and continues to be, Sitka spruce. Other diverse conifer species (Norway spruce, Douglas fir, Japanese larch, Lodgepole and Scots pines) are also present, as are areas of native broadleaves, with much of this diversity having been added since the felling and restocking/restructuring in the forest began.

Upper Sonachan is a mid-first rotation forest with approximately 44% of the original planted area having now been felled and restocked. Harvesting and restructuring of the remaining first-rotation crop is expected to continue throughout the four phases of the new Long-Term Forest Plan.

The new Long-Term Forest Plan will set out management proposals to maintain the economic viability of the forest while also enhancing its ecological and environmental value in accordance with the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS). This will focus on continued restructuring of the even-aged first-rotation crop through appropriately phased felling and restocking. Further restructuring of species will also be carried out where required to ensure appropriate levels of diversity in line with UKFS while also maintaining the property's economic viability through production of quality white-wood timber. The Plan will also comply with the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) to ensure the production of certified, sustainably managed timber for the future.

Location (Forest outlined red)



The Plan will:

- Record the current characteristics of Upper Sonachan.
- Set out proposals to restructure the remaining first-rotation conifers.
- Summarise the status of the forest and identify the opportunities and constraints that affect it.
- Identify the long-term policy for the forest, outline and prioritise objectives and provide a rationale for the stated management prescriptions.
- Include felling and restocking proposals and an overall management strategy covering a 20-year period up to 2044.

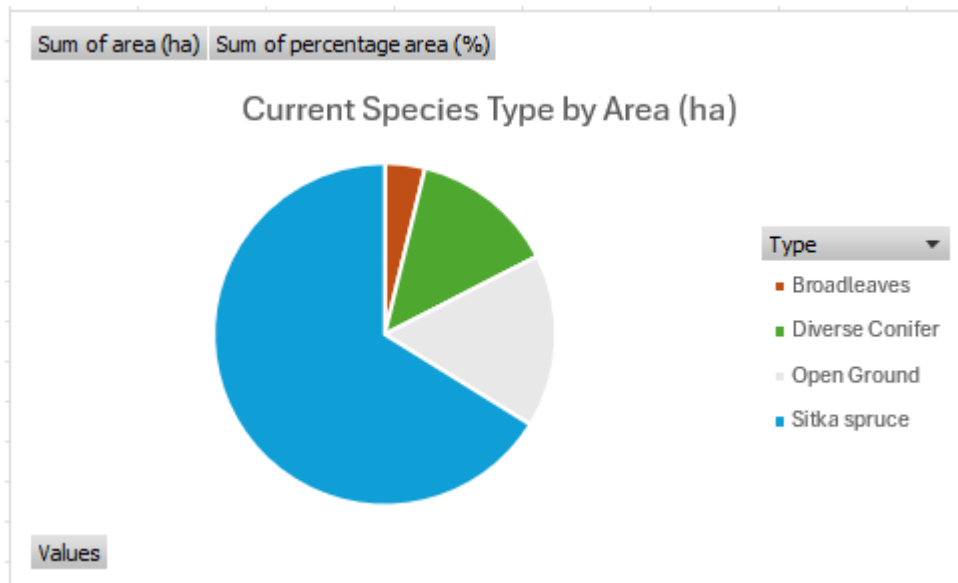
- Set out specific measures to maintain or enhance those areas identified as of high environmental value.
- Set out on-going monitoring criteria and establish a Plan Review process at 5-yearly intervals.
- Comply with industry best practice standards through compliance with UKFS and UKWAS.

The Owner's objectives are as follows:

- To maximise the value of standing crops through adopting suitable silvicultural and management techniques to produce quality timber that is suited to the best prediction of future timber processing requirements.
- To diversify the age class distribution towards achieving a sustainable programme of harvesting and restocking.
- To maintain and enhance the biodiversity value of the woodlands by on-going sympathetic management of key areas and adoption of practices and systems which minimise damage caused by forest operations and exploit opportunities to enhance the woodland environment which will in turn benefit biodiversity.
- To maintain and develop the landscape and conservation interests through the sympathetic management of those key landscapes and habitats identified in the Plan, and the progressive inclusion in key areas of a mix of broadleaf and conifer tree species, either by planting or natural regeneration and where appropriate broadleaf and mixed conifer planting.
- To act on the opportunities provided by restructuring to improve the protection and management of the landscape, public access and sensitive sites.
- To enhance the local landscape and provide opportunities for quiet recreation through further diversification of the woodland structure and with particular attention to species composition.
- Control of invasive weed species on compartment-by-compartment basis, where necessary, in conjunction with available external grant aid.
- To maintain a deer management policy, which will control the presence of deer to an acceptable level for successful regeneration.

Current Forest Structure

Species	SS	NS	LP	DF	JL	SP	MC	MB	OG	Total
Area	367.30	11.57	43.55	19.90	0.45	0.36	0.09	21.05	90.81	555.10
Species %	66.17	2.08	7.85	3.59	0.08	0.06	0.02	3.79	16.36	100.00



2. Consultees.

As part of the scoping process, the following statutory and advisory bodies have been contacted for consultation:

Consultee	Contact
Scottish Forestry	panda.cons@forestry.gov.scot
Argyll and Bute Council (planning)	planning.olandi@argyll-bute.gov.uk
Argyll and Bute Council (traffic and development)	James.Jackson@argyll-bute.gov.uk
Argyll and Bute council (private water supplies)	pws@argyll-bute.gov.uk
Argyll Fisheries Trust	info@argyllfisheritrust.co.uk
Argyll Timber Transport Group	s.stuart@outlook.com
Argyll Raptor Study Group	scottishraptorsg@gmail.com
Historic Environment Scotland	consult@hes.scot
Inveraray and Tyndrum Deer Management Group	falconfrost@gmail.com
NatureScot	argyll_outerhebrides@nature.scot
RSPB	glasgow@rspb.org.uk
Scottish Water	protectdwsources@scottishwater.co.uk

SEPA	adminsupportwest@sepa.org.uk
SSE	customerservice@sseairtricity.com
West of Scotland Archaeology Service (WoSAS)	enquiries@wosass.glasgow.gov.uk

Additionally, the following local stakeholders and neighbours have been identified and contacted:

Name
Achalic Farm
Ardbrecknish Hotel
Argyll Estates
Balliemeanoch Farm
Cladich Fold
Deer Stalking Syndicate
Glenorchy and Innishail Community Council
Landowner north of Cpt 1-4
Scottish Woodlands
Water Supply Cooperative (<i>group of individuals who take their water from a private source in the forest</i>).
Wider local community (<i>posters with contact details displayed at forest entrance and on noticeboards in Portsonachan and Cladich</i>)

3 Designations

Upper Sonachan is bordered in the northwest by an area of Long-established woodland of plantation origin (LEPO) as recorded in NatureScot's Ancient Woodland Inventory, a small sliver of which crosses onto the property boundary. It is listed as category 2b, meaning continuously wooded since at least 1860. According to NatureScot's 'A guide to understanding the Scottish Ancient Woodland Inventory', many LEPO sites 'have developed semi-natural characteristics, especially the oldest ones, which may be as rich as Ancient Woodland'.

A large proportion of the designated area within the forest boundary was previously planted with commercial conifer and has been treated as Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS). The area has been assessed and found to contain a number of Ancient Woodland indicator species. Following the felling of the first-rotation crop, PAWS areas have been restocked with native broadleaves and augmented by further native planting, creating linkage with other nearby areas of established broadleaves.

4 Ecological interests

Argyll & Bute Biodiversity Action Plan

Habitat Action Plan for Planted Coniferous Forest.

This HAP cited the threats to this habitat as:

- Windthrow and fire.
- Uniform age and species composition forests.
- Damage by pests and diseases.
- Potential for shorter rotations due to improvements made in species/timber research.

The impacts cited are:

- Loss of timber.
- Reduction of suitable habitat for key species.

The objectives stated to maintain and improve this habitat are:

1. Ensure that at least 1% of existing conifer woodland is set aside as long-term retention to improve diversity.
2. Monitor progress with re-structuring conifer forests.

Habitat Action Plan – Flowing Waters (Rivers and Streams)

Rivers and burns (streams) are defined as flowing watercourses which left in their natural state are dynamic and continually modifying their form.

Maintaining and improving the quality, state and structure of rivers and streams is the primary objective of this HAP. The Long-Term Forest Plan will integrate measures to protect and enhance the aquatic features of the property.

There are numerous watercourses within the forest which can be seen on the concept map (Appendix 3) provided, all of which drain into Loch Awe (SEPA ecological potential rating Moderate), which supports aquaculture and is a well-used recreational area. The *Allt an Eireannaich* burn also feeds a private water supply, servicing some properties in Ardbrecknish.

The Long-Term Forest Plan for Upper Sonachan will identify and review the ecological threats as they apply to the forest, set out objectives and work proposals that will mitigate against the impacts resulting from the stated threats, and help the forest meet the biodiversity objectives and protect water quality.

Priority Species

Whilst further surveys may identify other key species that utilise the habitats provided by Upper Sonachan, the following are known to be present:

- Red squirrel
- Pine Marten

Additionally, White-Tailed Eagles have been recorded flying over the forest in recent years and are known to nest in another nearby forest.

The Long-Term Forest Plan will identify and review the environmental and ecological threats as they apply to priority species, and will ensure that appropriate mitigation measures are implemented to avoid adverse impacts on the stated species and help contribute towards their future conservation.

Deer Management

The focus of deer management within the property is on direct control to aid the re-establishment of planted crops and to facilitate the expansion of native woodland and habitats through natural regeneration. Additionally, internal fencing has been employed in parts of the property to further aid these objectives.

Biosecurity

There are no known immediate tree health threats within the forest, but *Phytophthora ramorum* on larch has been found in neighbouring properties. There are small pockets of larch within Upper Sonachan which will be phased out when the surrounding crops reach an economic felling age and replaced with other species. Should infections appear before the time of planned harvesting, they will be dealt with in accordance with the requirements of the regulatory authority.

Invasive Species

Rhododendron ponticum and *Gunnera sp.* have both been recorded in the north of the forest. Both have largely been removed already but are subject to an ongoing programme of management.

5 Historical and Cultural Interests

Historic Environment Scotland's Canmore and Pastmap websites, along with the West of Scotland Archaeology Service (WoSAS) website, all show that there are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments, listed buildings or designed landscapes within the property. One unscheduled feature is present, details of which are listed below.

Feature Name	Description	Canmore ID	WoSAS Pin No.	Within Woodland?
Allt na Cuile Riabhaiche	What may be a single unroofed sheiling hut is depicted on the 1 st edition of the OS 6-inch map (Argyllshire 1874, cxxiv).	153665	44130	Yes

Features that are likely to interact with future forest operations will be afforded appropriate protection. Buffer zones from future planting will be applied in line with UKFS guidelines. Two other minor archaeological features have been noted during previous harvesting in the north of the forest (marked on concept map). These have been recorded and, as above, afforded appropriate protection during restocking.

6 Landscape Interests

Upper Sonachan lies within the North Argyll Area of Panoramic Quality. This is a local designation adopted in the Argyll and Bute Local Development Plan (2015). It identifies areas considered to be of high scenic value where development will be resisted if its scale, location or design will have a significant adverse impact on the character of the landscape.

The forest is most visible as part of the wider Cladich forest complex from the north shore of Loch Awe and from hill ground to the south and east. It has been a long-standing feature on the landscape as part of this wider forest area. Commercial forestry is ubiquitous in the local area with plantations at various stages of harvesting and restocking covering much of the marginal hill ground throughout Lochaweside, Lochfyneside, and Glens Lochy and Orchy. The forest sits well in the context of this wider area of extensive woodland cover. Restructuring of age classes through future harvesting and restocking will continue to enhance the block's visual diversity and landscape value.

At a more local level, the entrance at Ardbrecknish is the most visible part of the forest, with a small part also being visible from the B840. The area closest to the road in the north of the forest has already been restructured with a mixture of broadleaves and diverse conifers to increase visual interest.

7 Access

Timber Haulage

The forest is served by a network of internal forest roads and tracks which meet the B840 close to the village of Ardbrecknish. The forest road network also links into the neighbouring Keppochan East & Tullich forest to the East, allowing timber traffic from Upper Sonachan to avoid the restricted B-road and instead join straight onto the A819 Dalmally-Inveraray road. Roads and tracks will be maintained on an as-required basis to facilitate forest operations.

Permissions

As mentioned elsewhere, there are private water supplies in the north of the forest for which there is a right of extraction in place. There are also wayleaves within the forest. Both features are shown on the concept map.

Public Access

There are no records of core paths or claimed rights of way in the forest. Access to the wider forest is permissible under the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

8 Felling and restructuring

The majority of the remaining first-rotation timber in Upper Sonachan is expected to be harvested in the first 15 years of the Long-Term Forest Plan period, with the exception of long-term retentions and natural reserves. Proposed felling phases are outlined in Appendix 3.

The felling plan for the forest has been designed to spread and balance harvesting activity around the block, while focusing in the first instance on areas at risk of windblow due to existing brown edges.

Restocked areas will be allowed to reach an average height of at least two metres before further adjacent harvesting, thus creating a more normalised age and height structure than would have been present at initial planting.

Sitka spruce will continue to be the dominant species during restructuring, with an increase of other diverse conifer species in areas of appropriate ground and increased broadleaf planting in the riparian zones around watercourses. Areas of internal open space will also be included both for biodiversity benefits and to create a more resilient, wind-firm future forest.

Felling phases by area (%)

Total LTFP Area (ha)		555.10											
Felling	Phase 1	%	Phase 2	%	Phase 3	%	Phase 4	%	Outwith Plan	%	N/A (LTRs, NRs, OG)		%
Area (ha)	68.20	12.29	118.87	21.42	95.02	17.12	0.00	0.00	161.23	29.05	111.75		20.13

Forest Structure at year 20

Species	SS	NS	LP	DF	SP	MC	MB	OG	Total
Area	334.45	11.57	22.22	19.90	16.24	15.63	40.41	94.62	555.10
Species %	60.26	2.08	4.00	3.59	2.93	2.82	7.28	17.05	100.00

Sum of Area (ha) Sum of %Total Area

Species Type by Area (ha) at Year 20



Species Type Y20 ▾

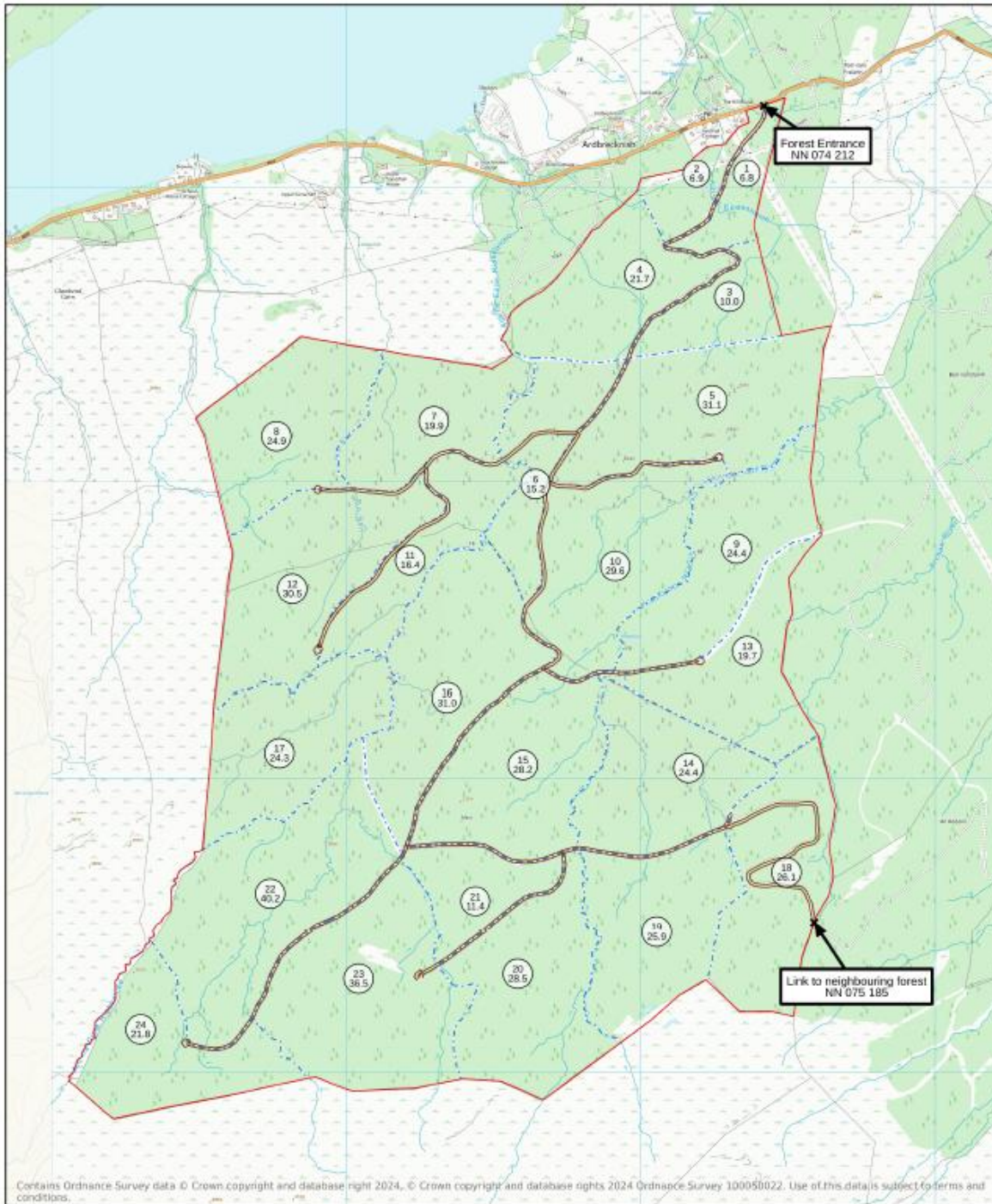
- Broadleaves
- Diverse Conifer
- Open ground
- Sitka spruce

Values

9 Responses

Consultation responses gathered during this scoping exercise will be recorded in the final version of the Scoping Report, which will be supplied to Scottish Forestry (the regulatory body) for review and included in the Long-Term Forest Plan.


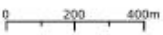
i – Forest Access Routes Map



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UPPER SONACHAN

LTFP Map 2 - Compartments

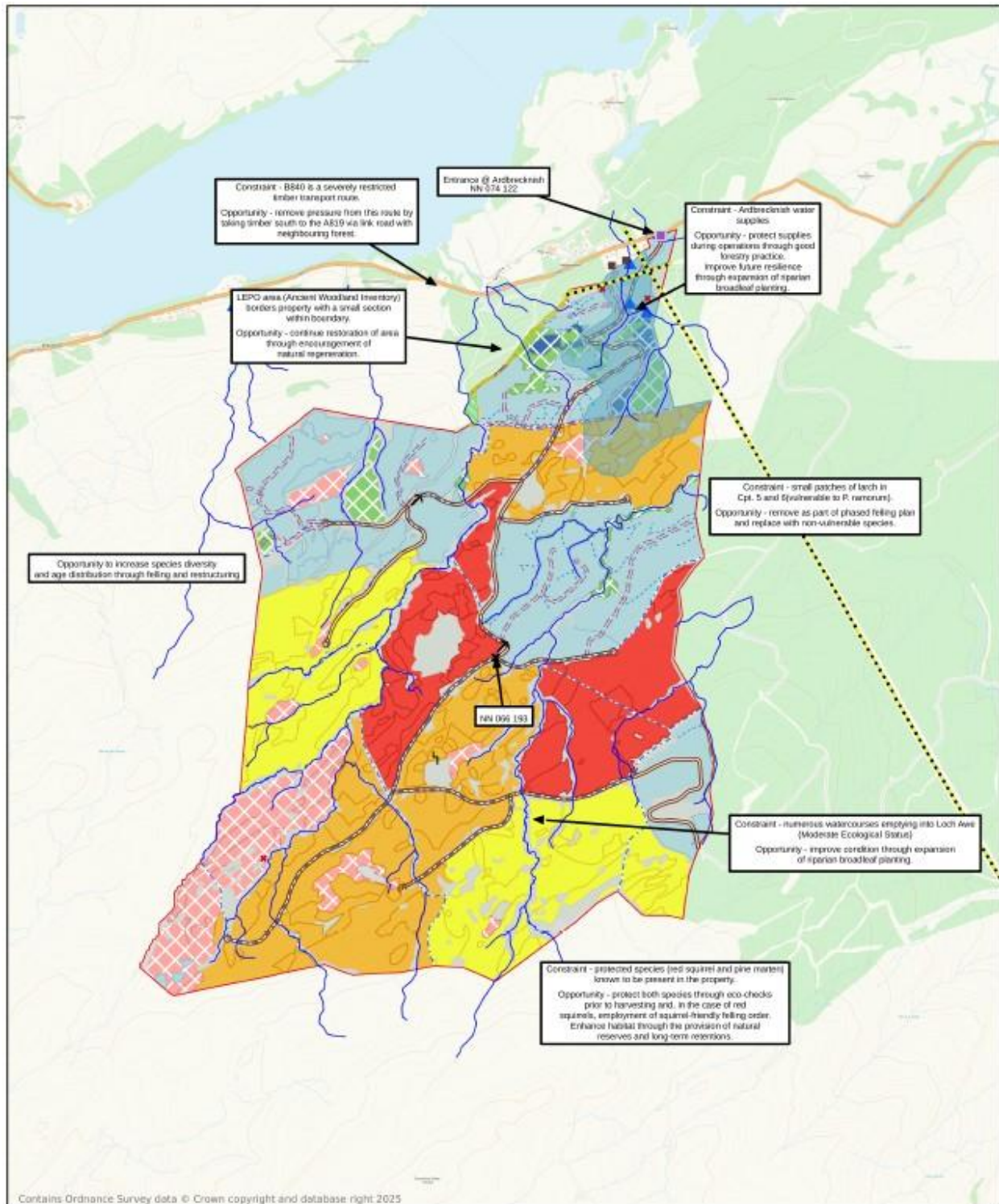
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 NN 06533 19584

 Scale: 1:12000
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 Forest Boundary

 Road
 Compartment Boundary

ii – Concept Map including draft felling proposals



UPPER SONACHAN

Concept and Felling (Scoping)

OS Grid Ref:
NN 06710 19601

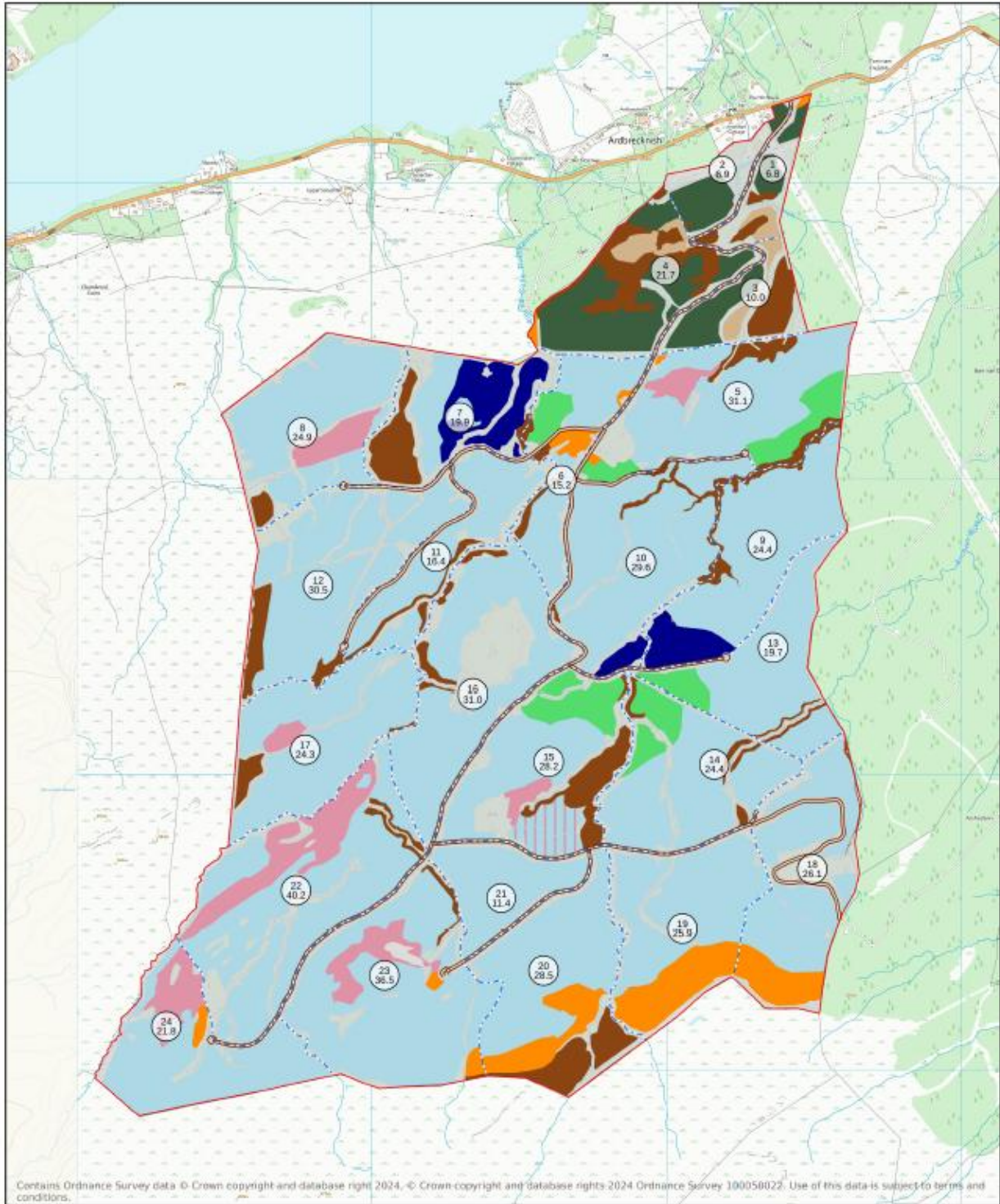
Scale: 1:16000
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- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access Point Archaeology Point Building Drain High Seat Powerline Overhead Powerline Quarry Watercourse | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water Supply Point Water Supply Pipe Designation Area LEPO Wc Catchment Forest boundary Road Track Compartment Boundary | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subcompartment Phase 1 Phase 2 Phase 3 Mtd-rotation LTS Natural Reserve Natural regen DG |
|--|--|---|

iii – Restocking map (species at year 20)



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UPPER SONACHAN

LTFP Map 10 - Restocking

OS Grid Ref:
NN 06445 19575

0 200 400m

Scale: 1:12000
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Forest boundary
Dead
Compartment boundary
Restock species

DF
LP
NS
NC

NI1
NI2
NI3
NI4
NI5
NI6
NI7
NI8
NI9
NI10
NI11
NI12
NI13
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