

Bracken Strimming

Objective

To control the spread of Bracken by strimming in areas where there is a risk of it replacing high quality grassland or dry heath habitats.

Background

Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) is a common fern in the Irish countryside, easily recognised by its tall, bright green fronds which can reach over 1.5m in height and turn brown in Autumn. Bracken was originally a woodland species which has spread into many other habitats. It tolerates a range of soil types from very acidic to very alkaline. Under certain conditions, such as where there has been heavy grazing or fires, Bracken can become dominant and where it does so; it can shade out the native vegetation leading to the loss of rare and protected heath, bog and high-quality grassland habitats.

Where Bracken comes to dominate the vegetation, it can lead to the loss of protected habitats, loss of grazing land, it can be poisonous to livestock, and it can provide a refuge for ticks which can transmit Lyme's disease.

Site Suitability

- This action can only be delivered on parcels with an Eligible Hectare > 0.
- This action is available on CP parcels only that will be claimed by the participant for the remainder of the ACRES contract.
- This action can only be selected on fields that have a scorecard submitted and is available on any scorecard. However, there will be restrictions to its approval on fields assigned with the Rough Grazing scorecard and within identified 'raptor zones'.
- Areas of dense Bracken that pose a threat to protected habitats, grazed habitats, to livestock or public health should be targeted for control.
- Can also be used to control areas of dense Bracken at key locations where it is interfering with access. Management of Bracken for access purposes is restricted to within 100m of existing access points to reduce the potential tick burden in these locations and reduce the spread of tick-borne diseases.
- Areas of Bracken that support woodland plants, e.g. Bluebells or ferns of ecological interest should be retained, as these are transitional woodland habitats.
- Bracken strimming should not be undertaken within 2m of watercourses, drains or other waterbodies.
- This action is not recommended on steep slopes as Bracken can stabilise the surface and any removal or management of Bracken in these areas can lead to increased erosion risk.
- Due to potential environmental effects, a maximum area of 1Ha will be considered for approval at a single location.

Requirements

1. The areas selected for Bracken Strimming must be identified on the LPIS parcel(s) and marked on the map submitted.

2. All Bracken within the target area must be strimmed at least twice in the one calendar year, firstly between May 1st and June 15th and the second 6 weeks later but no later than July 31st.
3. Bracken Strimming NPI payment is for treatment of the area using handheld strimmer only. The use of tractor with mower/topper is prohibited for delivery of this action.
4. If approval for this action is issued before the 15th of May, it is taken that this action will be delivered in the year of approval unless withdrawn before the 15th of June or before any notification of inspection. If approved after May 15th the NPI can only be delivered the following year and the same rules of withdrawal apply.

Additional Guidance

- Strimming /Cutting are the preferred control methods in May or early June on young fronds that have not fully unfurled.
- Follow up treatment is required and should be considered in at least two consecutive years. If there is no commitment to follow up treatment Bracken will recover, and the initial treatment will be wasted.
- Where Bracken is generally stunted, scattered, or naturally limited (e.g., growing along subsoil confined fissures and unlikely to spread out to form closed canopy stands), it is generally not considered a real problem needing direct control.
- Treatment type will vary depending on terrain and health & safety considerations.
- Work with care; Bracken is carcinogenic to humans, and it is also associated with a high occurrence of ticks and can increase the likelihood of transmission of Lyme disease. To reduce the risk, you should avoid entering areas of mature Bracken particularly from August to October (both months inclusive).
- On sites where Bracken is mixed with Brambles or other scrub, cutting other vegetation with a flail cutter the previous winter may facilitate access for treatment of Bracken later in the year.