

Bracken Mechanical

Objective

To control the spread of Bracken by mechanical methods (chain harrow, machine cutting, rolling, or bruising) 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 forage 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 risk to protected habitats, grazed habitats, to livestock or public health should be targeted for control.
- Areas of Bracken that support woodland plants, e.g. Bluebells or ferns of ecological interest must be retained.
- Bracken mechanical should not be undertaken within 6m of watercourses, drains or other waterbodies due to higher risk of soil erosion, run off and subsequent water quality impacts.
- 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 ticks.
- 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.
- The use of vehicles for Bracken control should not be used within the external perimeter of an Archaeological monument and Bracken Strimming should be selected instead.
- 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 Mechanical must be identified on the LPIS parcel(s) and marked on the map submitted.
2. All Bracken within the target area must be cut, rolled or bruised using mechanical equipment at least twice in the one calendar year, firstly between May 1st and June 15th and the second 6 weeks later (no later than July 31st).
3. If approval for this action is issued before 15th May, it is taken that this action will be delivered in the year of approval unless withdrawn before 15th 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

- Bracken bruiser is more effective on fronds that are fully developed in June.
- 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.