

Grazing Regime Evaluation Case Study:

Site 4 - Lake District

- 384 ha of overgrazed wet heath
- Reduced sheep stocking for habitat restoration



Background

Before the Foot and Mouth epidemic in 2001 this wet heath area was heavily grazed (especially *Calluna*), with winter stocking densities as high as 8 ewes ha⁻¹ reported (1.2 lu ha⁻¹). This was unsustainable. All the stock were culled during the Foot and Mouth disease outbreak. Following this, the site entered an Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme in 2002 and vegetation condition appears to have improved as it is only grazed at 2.08 ewes per hectare (0.31 lu ha⁻¹).

The site was a Heather Trust Demonstration Site at the time of the assessment and has been monitored under this project. The site is a common and the commoners have now entered a Wildlife Enhancement Scheme agreement with English Nature. This restricts grazing (2.78 ewes ha⁻¹) to around half the previous levels, although levels of winter grazing are considered still too high. Efforts are being made to increase the level of summer grazing while reducing winter levels using subsidy for away wintering. There is also potential for summer grazing by cattle to control grasses. As a designated common, it is currently not possible to use fencing to control grazing so the only tool available is adjusting grazing density and re-hefting the flocks.

Habitat condition assessment

The wet heath has been degraded due to overgrazing. Only 45% of the sample points had the indicator species *Erica tetralix* and only 27% of the points had adequate cover of wet heath indicator species. The site is also in unfavourable condition with respect to dwarf shrub browsing levels, being higher than the threshold value at 40-50% of sample points. There are also signs of burning damage to the bryophyte or lichen layer,

dwarf shrubs or other sensitive areas at 20-30% of sample points. Condition is better in terms of drainage, disturbance and invasive species, with only occasional areas of mesotrophic grasses or *Juncus effusus*. There are some signs of erosion, especially by a quarry area, which includes a track with disturbed bare ground.

Farm business and livestock

Current grazing regime:

Sheep @ 0.376 lu ha⁻¹ (6 May- 31 July)

Sheep @ 0.351 lu ha⁻¹ (1 August – 31 August)

Sheep @ 0.045 lu ha⁻¹ (Winter)

Sheep are Swaledales.

Current area based payments are Wildlife Enhancement Scheme and Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme. They also receive Sheep Annual Premium scheme at the time of assessment.

Other Management

Sheep are fed regularly on the moor during winter, which tends to keep them close to the foddering points, particularly close to the quarry.

Small areas of heather were burnt in March 2002 for demonstration purposes. Rank grassland is cut by the Lake District National Park Authority.

Shooting, recreation and landscape

There is no shooting on the site but red grouse counts have been carried out. Public access is used extensively.

Landscape is heterogeneous in appearance. The transition between the grasses and dwarf shrubs is particularly striking, but there is little flowering of *Calluna*.