

## Grazing Regime Evaluation Case Study:

### Site 5 - Forest of Bowland

- 80 ha of overgrazed dry dwarf shrub heath
- Restoration by summer only sheep grazing



#### Background

This site is located in the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The area is also a Special Protection Area under the European Birds Directive in recognition of its importance for moorland birds, including hen harrier, curlew and ring ouzel. It is monitored by English Nature and the RSPB as part of the Birds of Bowland Project, which is also supported by United Utilities plc.

Previous stocking rate has been very high in the past, although it has been variable. This resulted in degradation of the vegetation, with replacement of dwarf shrubs by grasses and extensive bracken invasion. The current low, summer only grazing regime was first introduced in 2001 under a Countryside Stewardship Scheme agreement. Since this grazing regime was introduced, grasses have become more rank on the steep slopes but existing *Calluna* is recovering. The area has been fenced to exclude stock in winter.

#### Habitat condition assessment

The dry dwarf shrub heath is in unfavourable condition with respect to species composition, pioneer regrowth, bracken cover and disturbed, eroded peat. Two thirds of the sample points have less than two dwarf shrub indicator species and less than 75% dwarf shrub cover. There is inadequate pioneer regrowth at all sample points. Large patches (>100 m<sup>2</sup>) of intensively disturbed, bare peat are visible from almost all sample points. There are also extensive areas of bracken.

The site is in favourable condition regarding the presence of bryophytes and lichens (present at 92% of sample points) and the absence of other invasive species

and other sources of disturbance. Where dwarf shrubs are present, browsing levels are acceptably low.

#### Farm business and livestock

Current grazing regime:

Sheep @ 0.225 lu ha<sup>-1</sup> for 10 weeks in summer.

Payments are also received for the CSS agreement.

#### Other Management

There is active shepherding under the CSS agreement with active input by the Rural Development Service (now Natural England).

#### Shooting, recreation and landscape

The general area is used extensively by the public. RSPB, United Utilities and English Nature organise expert guided walks focusing on birds of prey, and there are also farm wildlife walks. The profits from the walks go towards funding conservation work in the area. The site itself is more isolated and used very little for recreation. There is no evidence of trampling or erosion.

There is no economic shooting or associated management carried out on the site.

Landscape is heterogeneous in appearance, with rills, *Sphagnum*, bracken and blanket bog above, but with no sharp habitat boundaries. All boundaries are intact. Flowering *Calluna* is not visually striking, but *Eriophorum* is abundant except on the drier slopes.