

The Muirburn Code 2017 – Supplementary Information 6

Planning for Cutting

People

An advantage of cutting is that it does not require a team of people to carry it out safely, although appropriate health & safety risk assessments must be prepared, and operators need to be appropriately trained. In deep vegetation, someone may be required to walk ahead of the cutting vehicle to identify obstacles.

Machinery

There are many different types and sizes of machinery that can be used for cutting vegetation from large, tractor mounted machinery to hand held equipment. The choice will depend on issues such as availability, access, slope and the ground conditions.

The choice of machinery must be matched to the site conditions. High ground pressure machinery can cause significant damage through compaction, particularly on wet soils, and any cutting machinery can cause damage if it is allowed to scalp the surface.

In very dry conditions, the possible risk of ignition should be assessed, although it is likely to be low. Sources of ignition include sparks from blades hitting rocks or from the exhausts of poorly maintained engines.

Choosing where to Cut

Identify areas where cutting would be beneficial and possible, on its own or in combination with burning.

Cutting equipment should only be considered for use where:

- The ground is not too rocky, wet or inaccessible for safe use, and
- The machinery will not damage the vegetation, soil or any archaeological remains.

If cutting to create firebreaks, or as a substitute for burning, avoid creating squares or straight lines.

- Edges between short and tall heather, which are not straight, maximise the habitat that is attractive for ground-nesting birds, and
- Straight lines detract from landscape value.

After Cutting

In areas of dense vegetation, the cut material can form a mat, which reduces light and moisture reaching the surface. This can slow the rate of regeneration of vegetation after cutting and restrict the establishment of new seedlings. Where this becomes a problem, the removal of the cut material can be effective, providing there is suitable access.