

2. Long Mynd Bracken Management under HLS Agreement 2012-2019

Bracken dominates around 1000ha of Long Mynd and is spreading. Almost 500 more hectares have scattered bracken. Where it becomes dense it damages the high quality heathland habitat and associated species. It also threatens archaeological features and interferes with stock gathering in valley bottoms. The National Trust carries out a significant amount of bracken control each year, and will continue to try to control its spread as a priority.

- The future of chemical control of bracken is uncertain due to an EU ban on the fern specific herbicide, asulox. At the moment there is no similar authorised chemical available. However 'emergency use' was granted for restricted periods in the last 2 years, and it is hoped that this will be the case in 2014. If asulox is banned completely, focus will be on trying to extend the current mechanical control.
- Trampling by heavy livestock such as cattle and ponies may also help reduce bracken vigour. However there are only very limited rights for heavy stock on the common. Sheep tend not to eat bracken unless they are at very high stock levels which would be detrimental to the heather and other heathland wildlife.

Mechanical control.

This reduces the density of the bracken and allows grass and flowers to flourish beneath. It also increases the area of grass available for grazing, taking pressure off the adjacent heather. Unlike chemical control, mechanical control is largely restricted to accessible flattish areas of bracken over grassland, and at the moment all the easily accessible areas are already being cut.

Currently on Long Mynd common, 75ha bracken is earmarked for cutting. The cut frequency depends upon the density of the bracken. Most years half (35-40ha) of the earmarked area is cut. However, there is a possibility that some additional small areas (totalling 10 ha) could be brought under mechanical management if the asulox ban persists. See Maps.

Bracken cutting is done from July onwards to avoid damage to ground nesting birds. Common lizard also breed in these areas, so cut height and timing and methods also take the requirements of reptiles into account.

Chemical control.

Spraying is the most effective way to control bracken. Azulox (currently banned but see above) is the only chemical appropriate for treating bracken on the SSSI.

All spraying must comply with Natural England and Environment Agency constraints. These include the following:

- **Spraying cannot take place where drift may settle on watercourses (including flushes; buffer around watercourses varies depending on method, but is 50m for *aerial* control on SSSIs)**

- **Spraying cannot take place on steep slopes where there is a risk of erosion (i.e there is no understory) or on ledges, screes, gills, or where susceptible plant communities are present.**
- **Spray areas require approval from Environment Agency and must be carried out under appropriate licences**

In addition, areas sprayed must be small enough to allow necessary follow up. This is because there is an obligation under the current HLS agreement that sprayed areas should have a maximum of 5% cover by 2015.

Treatment to date: Of the 1500ha of bracken on Long Mynd, 450ha cannot be treated due to erosion concerns as it is on slopes with no understory. In addition it is not possible to spray close to watercourses or boggy areas. Areas known to be used by nesting Winchat should be avoided.

731ha were sprayed between 2000 and 2009. Since 2010 a further 118 ha have been sprayed (mostly by contractor but some by staff and volunteers). Under HLS there has also been a stronger emphasis on follow-up control. This has been carried out mostly by contractor but again with some staff and volunteer help. We are awaiting an estimate of the area covered to date from our contractor.

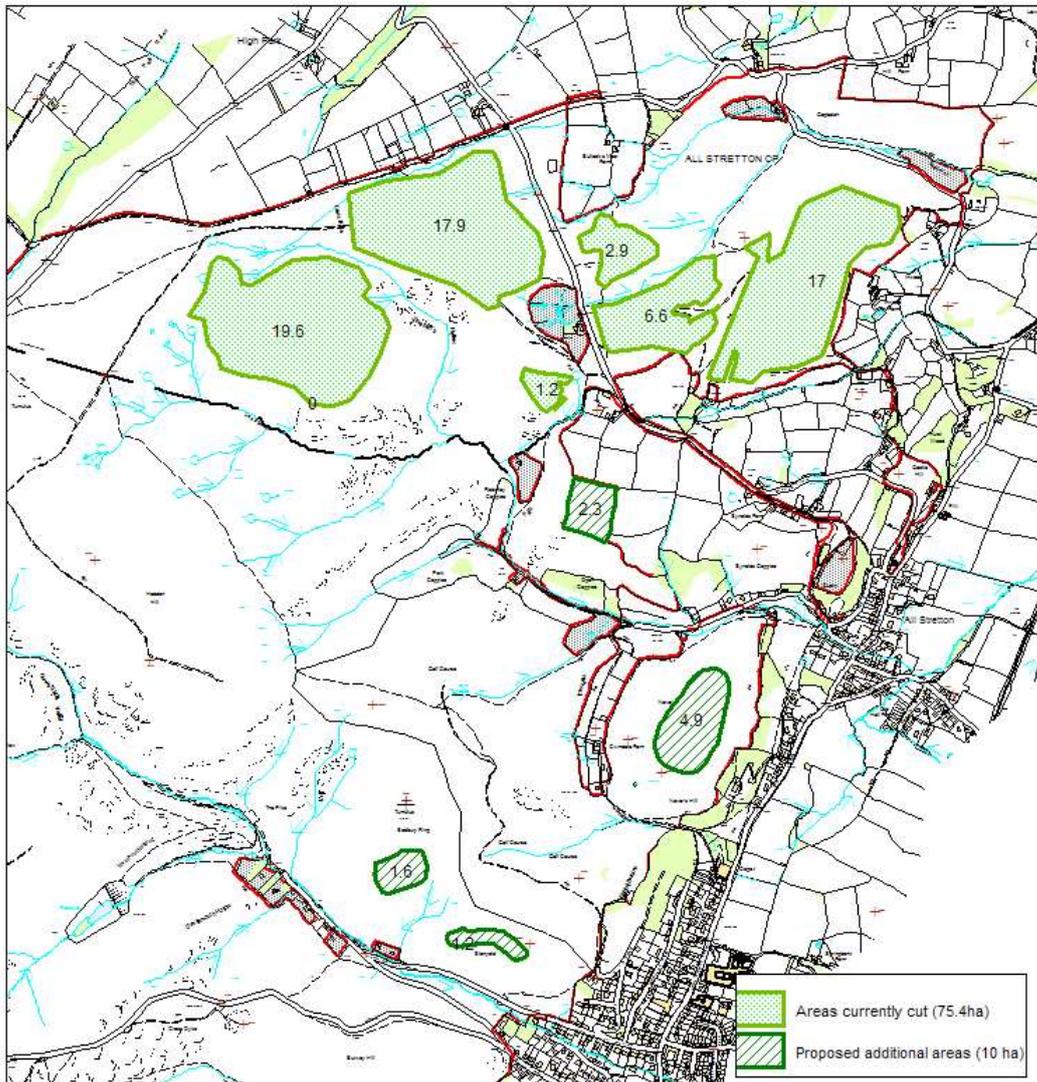
Costs: Bracken costs about £250 per ha to treat by chemical. This is the price for a single treatment –but it will need to be retreated multiple times.

- Where bracken is sprayed for the first time NT can claim 50% of the costs back from Natural England (HLS). The rest comes from the property budget.
- There is no capital payment for follow-up so this is funded entirely from the property budget.

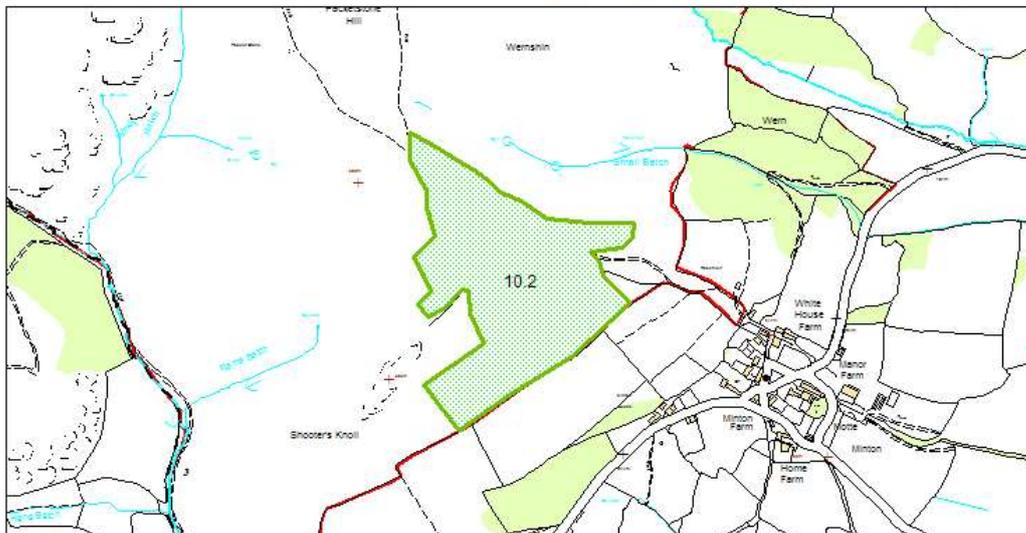
Future: Cutting will continue as before. Assuming Asulox is available, NT will put £5000 per year into bracken spraying. This will be split between:

- Opening and maintaining stock gathering paths in valley bottoms (low area but labour intensive). It is anticipated that the Long Mynd graziers will be involved with this.
- Targeting key areas on the plateau e.g. where bracken is moving into recent heather burns
- Follow-up treatment for areas sprayed 2-3 years previously.

Areas proposed for mechanical bracken control under HLS
2012-2019 - Northern end

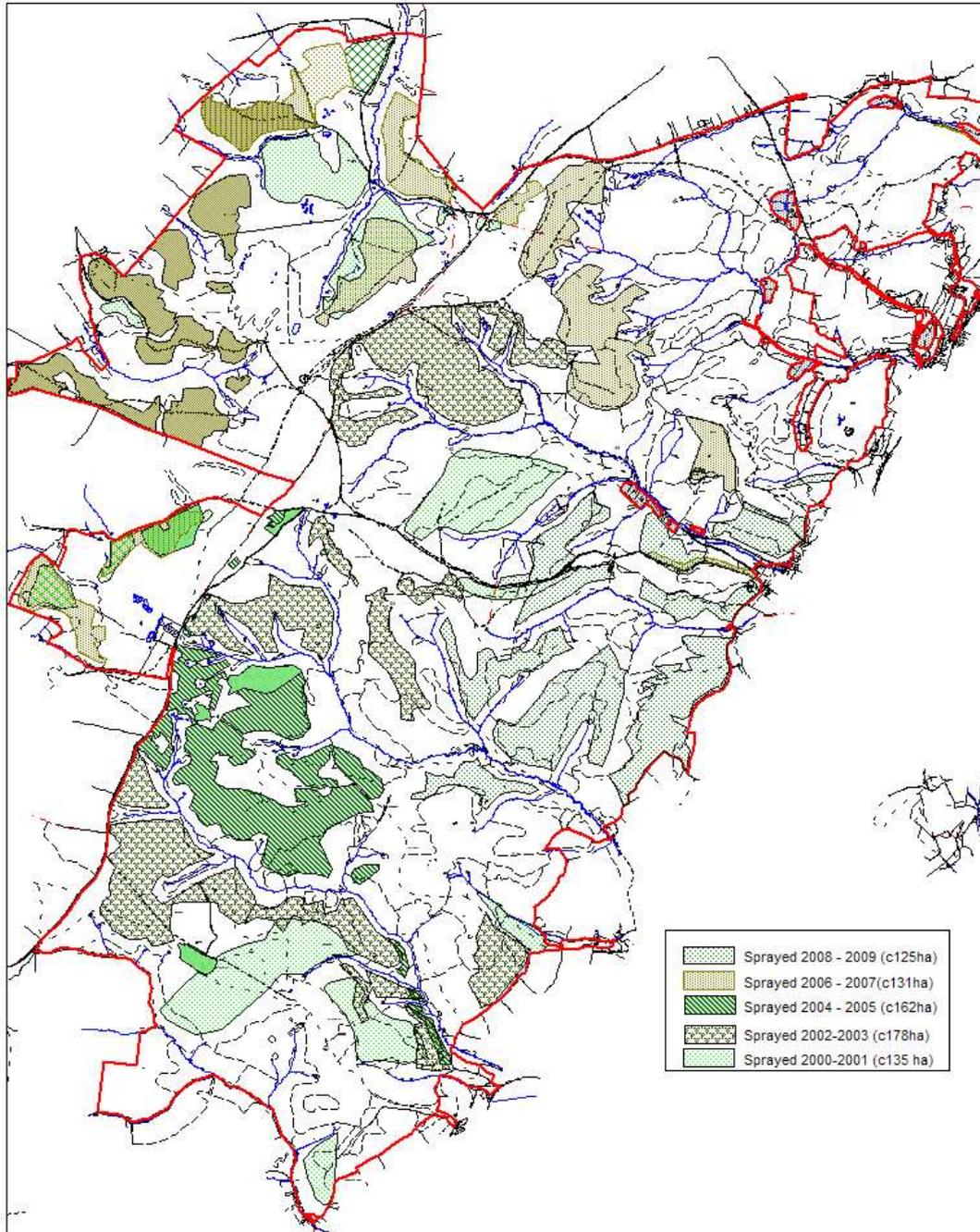


Areas proposed for mechanical bracken control under HLS
2012-2019 - southern end



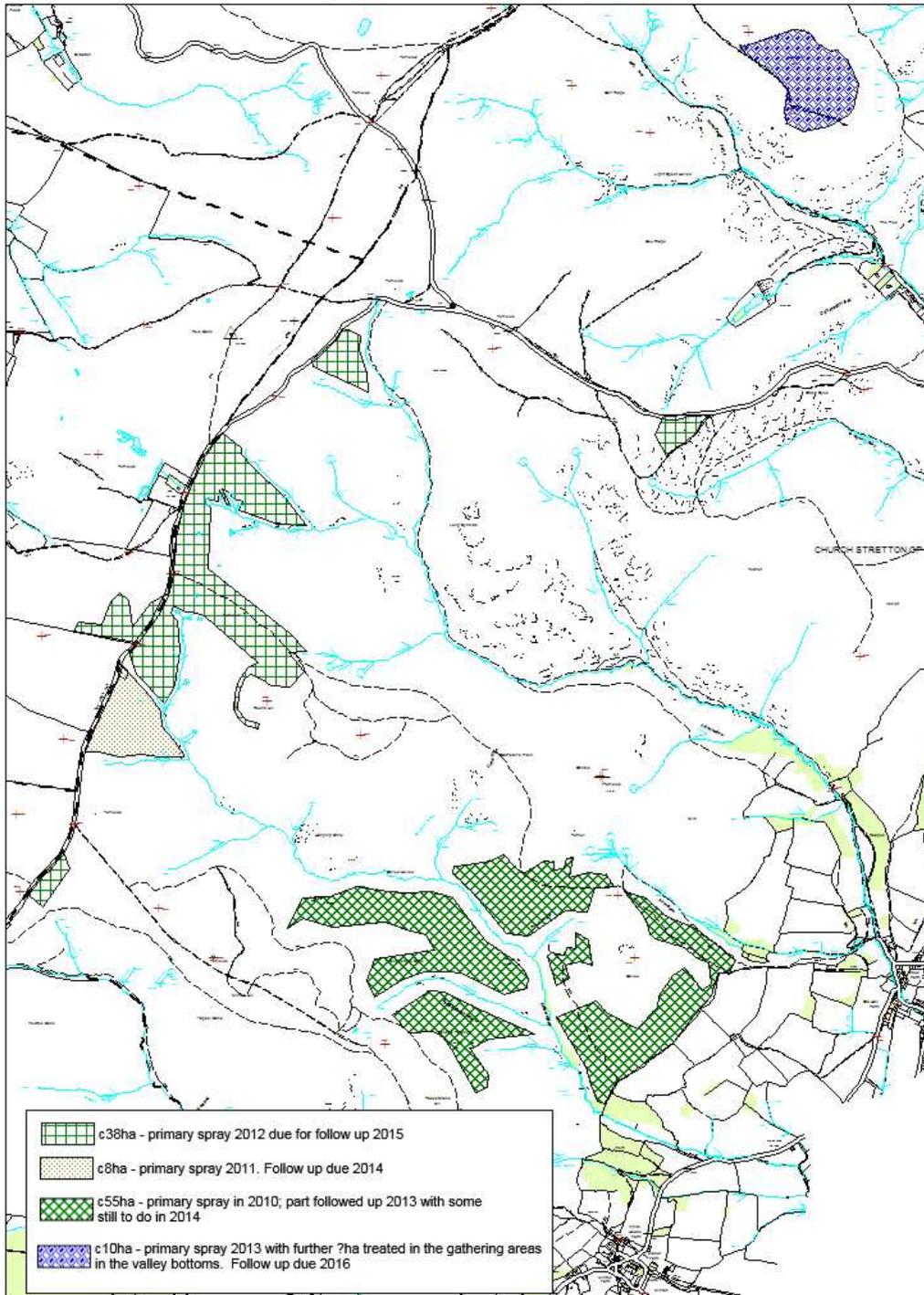
Map Showing areas chemically treated under the previous ESA agreement between 2000 and 2009

Chemical Bracken Control under ESA 2000 - 2009



Map showing areas chemically treated to date under the current HLS agreement (2010-2019). Note: areas treated under HLS will require follow-up treatment as they must have below 5% bracken by year 5 of the agreement.

Bracken sprayed under HLS 2010-2013



Last updated Oct 2013